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PRIVATE EYE

VALENTINE SPECIAL

Together Again!

INSIDE: Free Royal Romance Collection –
THE DUCHESS OF LOVE **by Sylvie Krin**

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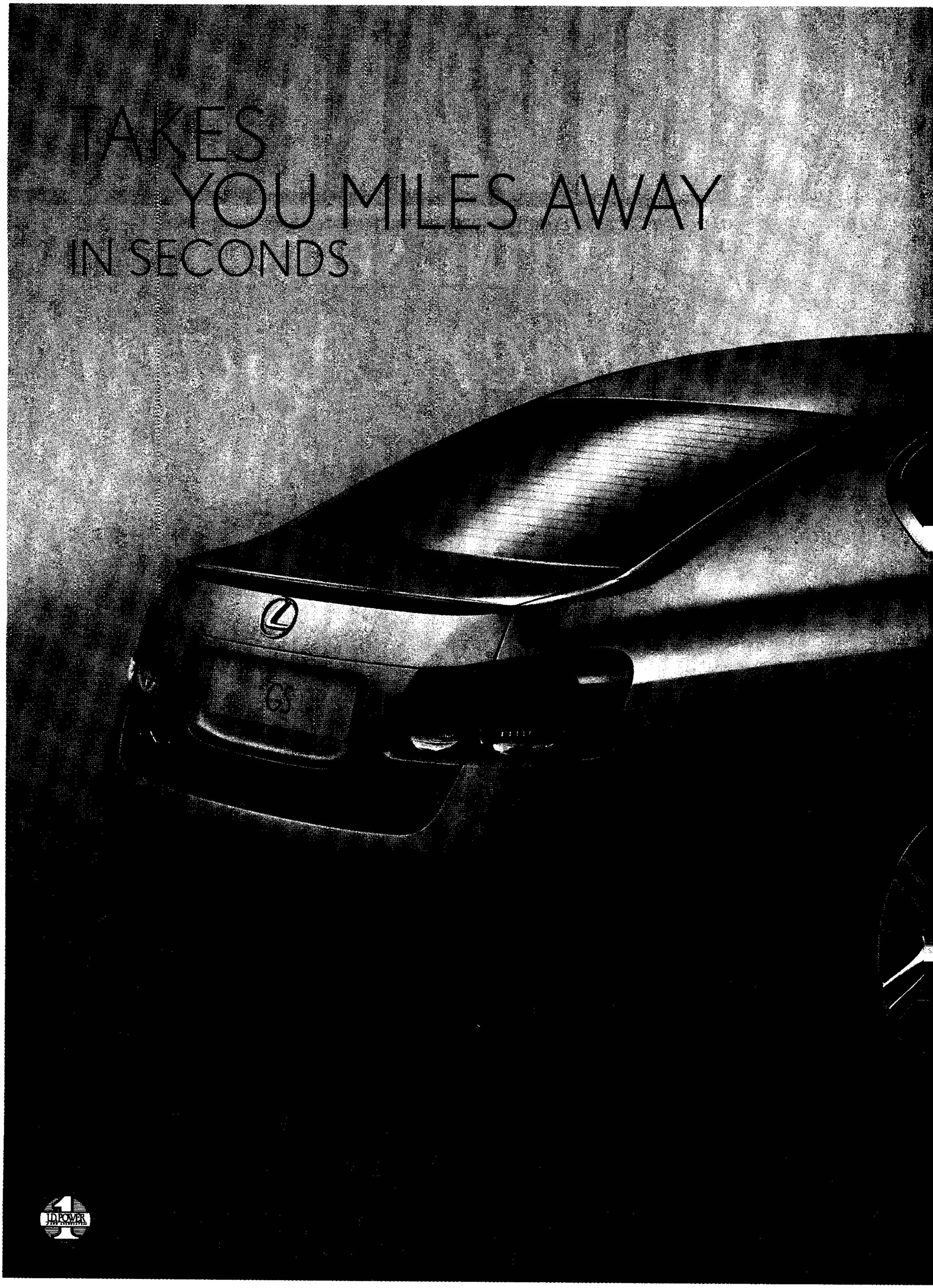

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Gnome

A FREE PRESS

In this country we are fortunate to have a long tradition of press freedom... jewel in crown... absolute right to publish cartoons... cornerstone of liberty... John Milton... John Wilkes... valiantly fought for... hallmark of a truly civilised society... bulwark of democracy... naturally freedom not absolute... John Locke... need to respect others' beliefs... no licence to give gratuitous offence... excitable chap, Johnny Muslim... might get bomb through window... got to be careful... funny-looking bearded bloke in the car park... perhaps this editorial's a bit strong... jolly good chaps, these Muslims... we are right behind them in banning these cartoons... those Danes should be strung up if you ask me...

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"I'm arresting you for committing an Islamophobic hate crime"

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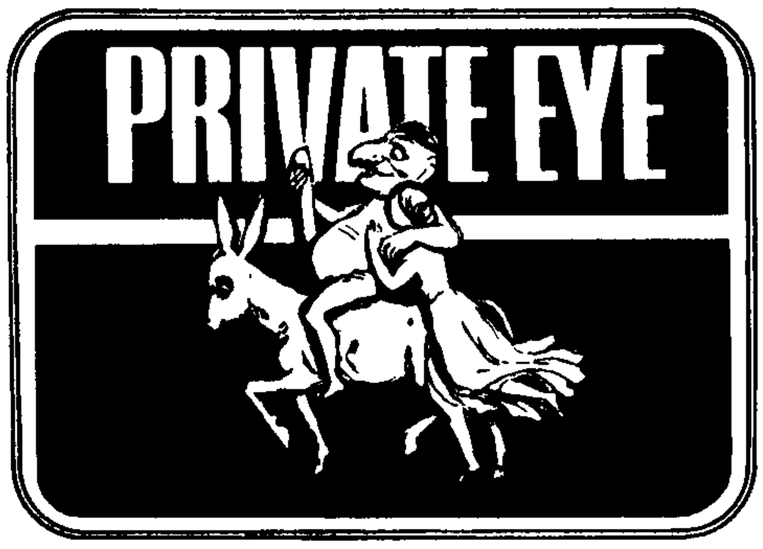

From the heart...

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Curse of Gnome

SINCE last October Lord Gnome has been highlighting the dubious achievements of stockbroker Barry Townsley and asking how on earth Tony Blair could contemplate giving him a peerage (see *Eyes* 1144, 1147, 1149).

The House of Lords appointments commission clearly shared these doubts, continually holding up the honours list in which Townsley was due to appear. After a three-month battle of wills between the commission and Downing Street, Townsley has at last withdrawn his name from the list of nominations, blaming "media abuse".

As his spokesman complained on Monday, ever since the list was leaked certain publications have been "going on and on about all sorts of things, and he has just got fed up with it. He just feels he would rather not be considered."

Poor little diddums!

WE REVEALED in the last *Eye* that Tony Blair's dear friend Lord Levy has for some years been using a mews flat in Marylebone purely as an office, even though it's officially designated as residential property. We also noted that Westminster council had ignored demands from neighbours that planning laws should be enforced.

Two weeks ago the director of planning wrote to a mews resident who had complained, saying the case would be investigated but it would be a slow business, thorough inquiries needed, no early conclusions likely, etc.

The very next day, however, the council sent a follow-up letter with a strikingly different tone. It revealed that Westminster council has now warned Levy "that the lawful use of the premises is for residential purposes and that it should not be used for office purposes". The council will "monitor the use of the property in future" and take enforcement action against his lordship "should it be used for unlawful purposes". Better still, it is appealing to neighbours to grass him up "should you become aware that it is being used as an office again".

Why the sudden change of attitude? Could it by any chance be related to the fact that the second letter was written the day after the *Eye* story appeared?

MUCH intrigue about the memo prepared by former Downing Street spin doctor turned PR consultant Tim Allan for Sky's new head of communications, Matthew Anderson, in which Allan suggested how Sky could offset its negative image by ingratiating itself with political power brokers.

He proposed inviting Culture Secretary Tessa Jowell, or "Tessa" as she was called in the memo, to deliver a keynote address at a Sky-sponsored seminar; asking Gordon Brown and other ministers to a lunch hosted by James Murdoch; and wining and dining rising MPs.

What most of the media ignored is why Allan was sending this memo now. Could it have something to do with the recent departure of Julian Eccles, Anderson's predecessor in the Sky communications department, which has deprived the company of one of its "new" Labour insiders? Eccles was a former foreign policy adviser to Labour and also spent some time working at the Department of Culture, Media and Sport. You can't buy that kind of influence.

Or, to judge by Allan's memo, perhaps you can.

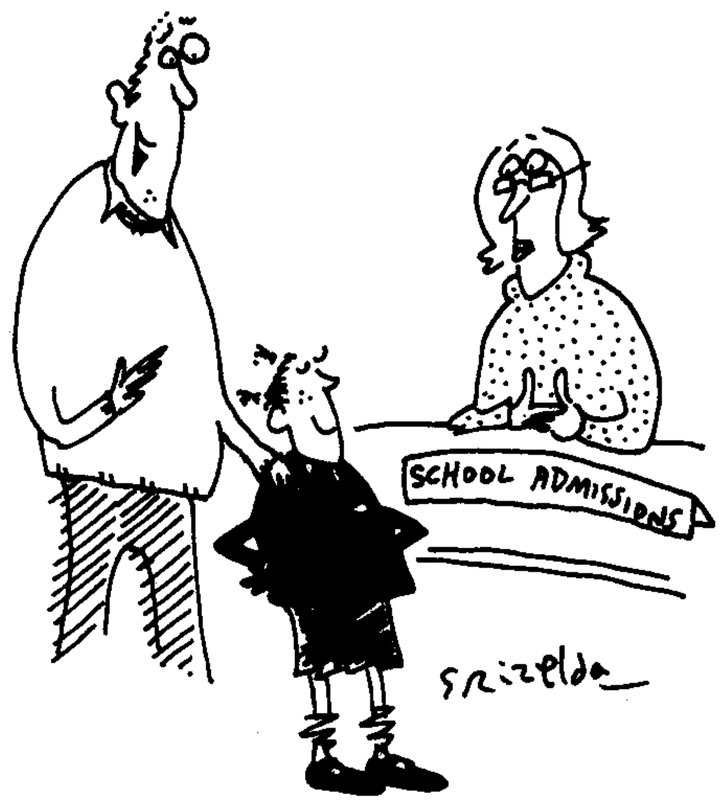
SLEEPY listeners tuned in to Radio Five's *Up All Night* phone-in last week were taken aback at 2.45am to hear a call from a well-known Liberal Democrat MP.

The subject of the phone-in was romantic love and Valentine's Day, but the insomniac Simon Hughes wanted to discuss… his party's famous victory in the Dunfermline by-election instead!

Hughes, who has talked publicly about his love life rather a lot recently, was eventually drawn on the matter in hand and offered his preferred choice of Valentine's gift – 12 yellow roses. But he declined to say to whom he might be sending them...

CONGRATULATIONS to victorious Lib Dem Willie Rennie, who stormed to victory in Dunfermline and West Fife.

His victory came despite the recent travails of his party – and, even more impressively, campaigning throughout the Mark Oaten and Simon Hughes revelations beneath the inspired slogan "Liberal Democrats: Win With Willie".



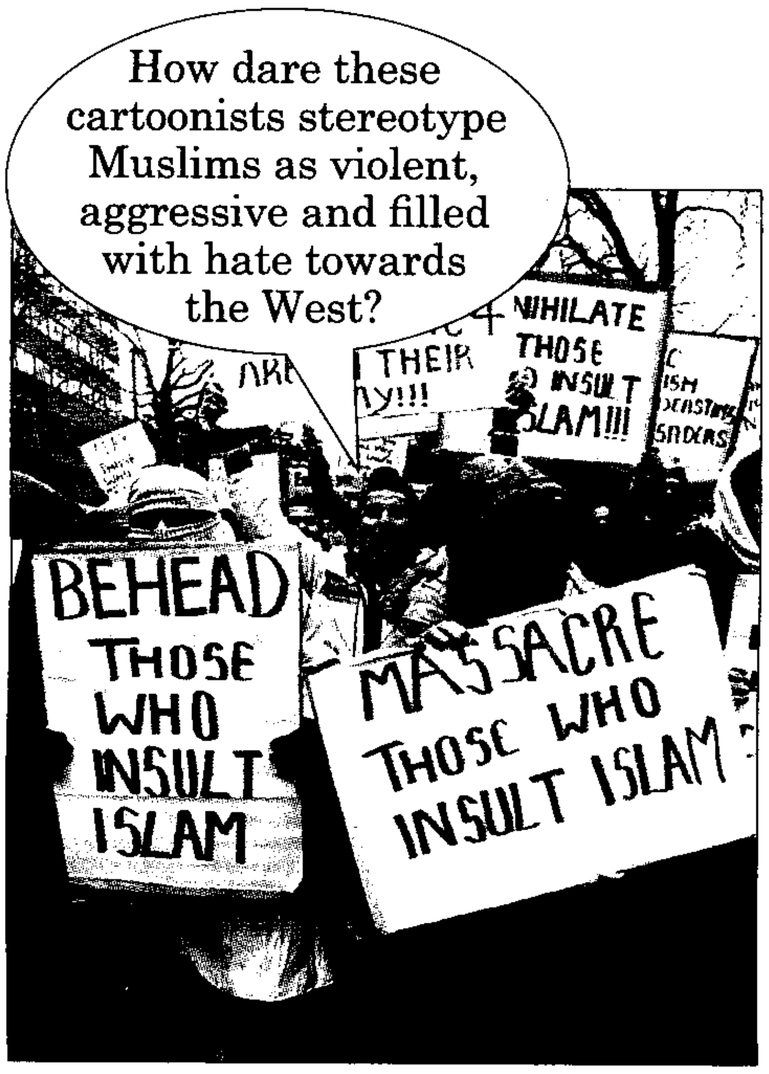
"She's very bright – she can follow the debate on education reforms"

Street Of Shame

HOW DID the publication of 12 cartoons in Denmark's *Jyllands Posten*, a newspaper with a circulation of less than 150,000 people (a considerably smaller minority than the country's 270,000 Muslim population), lead to a dozen deaths in Afghanistan, the suspension of aid work in Chechnya, the torching of an embassy in Lebanon and threats of beheading on the streets of London more than four months later?

Much of the credit must go to Danish Imam Ahmad Abu Laban. Last December – two months after the cartoons were published and weeks after six worshippers at his Copenhagen mosque were arrested on suspicion of planning terrorist activities – Abu Laban and colleagues from the Islamic Society of Denmark embarked on a trip to Egypt, Syria and Lebanon for meetings with imams and ministers in the Arab League, carrying with him a 43-page dossier in which were reproduced all 12 of the *Jyllands Posten* cartoons. Helpfully, Abu Laban and his companions also included three other images – one of the prophet with the face of a pig, one of a praying Muslim being sodomised by a dog and one of a devilish figure captioned "the paedophile prophet Mohammed", all of which were considerably more offensive than anything the paper had published. Ahmed Akkari, spokesman for the tour, claimed that they had merely been included for context, to "give an insight into how hateful the atmosphere in Denmark is towards Muslims."

But where did these pictures originate? In two cases, this is still not known (though the "paedophile" image resembles the sort of scrawl which is regularly found on toilet walls). But the *Eye* can reveal – with thanks to blogger Neandernews – that the "pig" picture is actually an Associated Press photograph taken last August at an agricultural fair in Trie Sur Baise, France. Rather than the prophet Mohammed, it actually depicts one Jacques Barrot competing in the village's annual "pig-squealing competition", in which local farmers dress up and demonstrate their imitative skills as part of a day-long celebration of the area's culinary speciality. Barrot did not even win.


How dare these cartoonists stereotype Muslims as violent, aggressive and filled with hate towards the West?
BEHEAD THOSE WHO INSULT ISLAM
MASSACRE THOSE WHO INSULT ISLAM

SO HOW offensive are the original twelve cartoons? According to Bill Clinton, they are "appalling, totally outrageous cartoons against Islam"; George Carey called them "cartoons lampooning the Prophet... deplored by all people who wish to see peace and harmony prevailing in our fractured world"; Peter Mandelson dismissed them as "pretty crude and pretty juvenile"; and Ken Livingstone said they were "a deliberate and gratuitous insult to the Muslim community, designed to destroy trust and understanding... bordering on racist".

Really? The nature of the offence that the cartoons are perceived to have caused is almost entirely down to the fact that they portray Mohammed at all, rather than the points that the cartoonists themselves are trying to make. The idea that there should never be any depiction of the prophet is not and has not ever been universally accepted in Islam, but is widely believed by many Muslims. Hence the protests. But what of the individual cartoons? Without reproducing the drawings (for reasons eloquently outlined in the Gnome column) here is a brief summary of the twelve:

1. An image of Mohammed with a bomb in his turban, suggesting presumably that Islam has been used as an excuse for violent terrorism. The worldwide reaction to this, the most widely publicised of the images, would appear to support the cartoonist's point.

2. Mohammed in heaven greets a number of suicide bombers with the words, "Stop, stop, we have run out of virgins". Of all the "cartoons", this one comes closest to being a joke, and its point has less to do with the prophet than the misuse of Islam to encourage young men to commit murder on the promise of such a reward in the afterlife.

3. A cartoonist sweats with fear as he draws a straight portrait of Mohammed. A self-fulfilling prophecy, since the artists did duly receive death threats.

4. Another accurate prediction: a figure (presumably Mohammed) attempts to calm down two armed followers with the words: "Relax, it's just a drawing by a cartoonist from the South West of Denmark."

5. One of three cartoons openly critical of the paper's decision to print images of Mohammed: The author Kåre Bluitgen, who kicked off the whole controversy when he claimed to be unable to find an artist willing to illustrate his children's book *The Qur'an and the life of the Prophet Muhammad,* holds up a stickman portrait and wears a hat with the slogan "PR Stunt".

6. A schoolboy captioned as "Mohammed Valbyjkele, 7A" points to a slogan in Persian on a blackboard which reads "Jyllands-Posten journalists are a bunch of reactionary provocateurs". On this point both the cartoonist and his many critics would seem to agree.

7. A figure commenting that he is unable to pick out Mohammed from an identity parade of figures in turbans, including various other religious figures – and Kåre Bluitgen, who is holding up a sign which says "Kåre's public relations, call and get an offer".

8. One of a pair of cartoons which comment on Islam's treatment of women. An abstract drawing of a group of women whose heads are formed from traditional Arabic symbols the star and crescent, along with a poem criticising the prophet for "Keeping women under yoke".

9. A picture of an aggressive Mohammed in which the eyes have been blocked out by a black line to prevent his identification. The black line parallels the eye-hole in the hijabs of two women behind him, every other part of whose bodies is "censored".

10. The face of Mohammed with a star and crescent forming his eye and the outline of his face.

11. A cartoon-style portrait with a glowing object above the figure's head that could be

interpreted as a halo, a pair of Viking horns, the Islamic crescent or a combination of them.

12. An entirely reverent portrait of the prophet leading a donkey through the desert, suitable for use in a children's book.

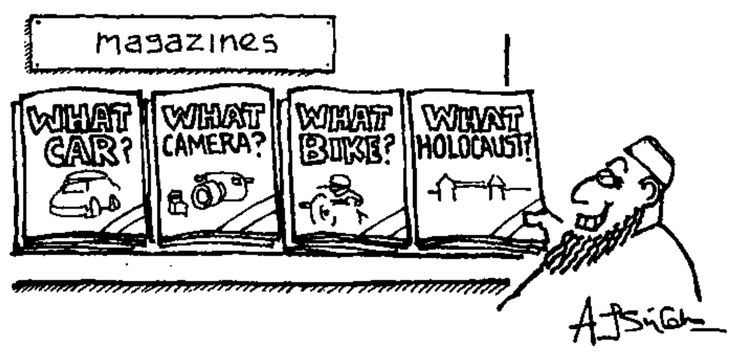
And that's it. As many have pointed out, these cartoons are arguably much less offensive than the anti-semitic cartoons published regularly in the Arab press, the cartoon displayed during a recent Indonesian protest of the Danish Prime Minister having his throat cut, any number of portrayals of Jesus Christ in the western media over the last 50 years etc, etc, etc.

ON THE day after Abu Hamza's conviction, a lofty *Grauniad* editorial suggested that the media should learn a lesson. "It is regrettable that those with the loudest voices and most repulsive views are most often seen and heard. It was a misjudgement by the BBC's *Today* programme to broadcast a long interview about the Danish cartoons on Monday with Omar Bakri Mohammed..."

But it isn't just the BBC which is responsible for maintaining Omar Bakri in the public eye. The *Grauniad* has run at least 24 stories about him in the last year, including a full-page profile noting that although his enemies see him as "the Preacher of Hate" others regard him as "a distinguished Islamic scholar, a devoted family man persecuted in the same way as was the prophet Mohammed".

Nor is he the only fanatical Islamist loudmouth to enjoy the *Grauniad*'s editorial hospitality. Over the past couple of years its comment pages have run innumerable pieces by propagandists from Hizb ut Tahrir, Hamas, the Muslim Brotherhood – and even al-Qaeda. Osama bin-Laden made his debut as a *Grauniad* columnist in January 2004; last August there was a piece by Saad al-Fagih, who is listed by the UN as an associate of bin-Laden and al-Qaeda (though the paper omitted to mention this – see *Eye* 1140). And three months ago *Grauniad* hackette Madeleine Bunting conducted an excruciatingly *arslikhan* interview with the bloodthirsty buffoon Yusuf al-Qaradawi, drooling over his scholarly brilliance and "independence of mind" while nimbly side-stepping his support for suicide-bombing, wife-beating and so forth.

Clearly this cannot be the same paper which now rebukes the BBC for giving airtime to Omar Bakri Mohammed. What set Omar Bakri on the road to media stardom anyway? Probably an epic 9,500-word interview ("Oh What a Lovely Jihad") published back in 1997 by the Weekend magazine of... the *Guardian*.



LOUCHE *Sunday Times* hack Rod Liddle is in yet more trouble. Messrs Russell Jones & Walker, notorious for their ceaseless litigation on behalf of Inspector Knacker and his kind, have written to the paper threatening a libel action from two Merseyside police officers, one male and one female.

The offending piece was a column by Liddle on 22 January describing his "hellish" visit to Goodison Park to watch Millwall play Everton. After the game, he complained, police forced him and all the other away fans on a five-mile route march to Lime Street station, whether or not they actually wanted to go there. He wasn't even allowed to hail a cab instead.

Presumably Russell Jones & Walker will claim that their two clients have been defamed. But they may have a job proving it. Liddle did indeed criticise two police officers in the piece. One was described merely as "an incalculably dense, porky little Hitler of a Merseyside copper yapping out orders from astride his horse"; the other simply as an "astonishingly stupid woman on a horse" who refused to let him take a taxi.

Since no other distinguishing features were mentioned, the two rozzers will have to show that they are identifiable from these descriptions. Shome mishtake, shurely?

REPORTING on the business affairs of your proprietor is a bind for any newspaper. But these things have to be done.

The *Daily Mail*'s City pages could not ignore the fact that its owner, Daily Mail & General Trust, was selling its regional arm Northcliffe newspapers. Happily, it was able to reprint the reassurances of chairman Lord Rothermere that the company would not be going private once the sale went through, and his protracted agonies about flogging off Northcliffe. "It's like losing a member of the family."

But this openness only goes so far at the *Mail*. A week earlier, it could find no space for the criticisms delivered by one of Britain's largest shareholder groups, the Association of British Insurers, of DMGT's corporate governance. The Association questioned the independence of the DMGT's remuneration committee and attacked the executive pay structure which would allow *Mail* editor Paul Dacre to walk away with £2m were his contract to be terminated. Perhaps City editor Alex Brummer feared that if he did report it then he might be walking away himself – but with considerably less than £2m.

A FINE specimen of Glenda Slaggery from Helena Frith Powell in the *Daily Mail* last Thursday.

"What planet is Ralph Fiennes on?" she demanded indignantly, noting that despite living with a beautiful actress "he couldn't resist the young totty on the side… The result? Fiennes has split with his long-term partner, the wonderful Francesca Annis, after an affair with a 31-year-old singer of uncertain talents beyond her looks. How stupid. And how downright predictable."

Er, perhaps not so predictable to *Mail* readers. For only two days earlier they had been assured that "Francesca Annis has forgiven boyfriend Ralph Fiennes for having a two-year affair with a woman half her age". Citing an unnamed "friend" of the actress, *Mail* hack Nicole Lampert revealed exclusively that "Miss Annis is planning to stand by Fiennes".

Annis is now suing the *Mail* for libel. Will the paper's only source, her alleged "friend", be willing to testify?

THE *Mirror* scored an exclusive with its 9 February revelation that Linda Nolan, of 70s group the Nolan Sisters, is suffering from breast cancer – only slightly marred by illustrating the front-page scoop with a large photograph of her sister, Bernie.

If the paper has difficulty knowing its Nolans in future, it could perhaps consult its regular agony aunt, who by chance happened to be penning a column for the paper that very day – one Coleen Nolan.

A *SPECTATOR* reader informs agony-aunt "Dear Mary" of an incident where a guest at a recent shooting party spotted someone he didn't like and promptly left before the day had even begun.

Mary is appalled. "The amount of effort and money which goes into planning a day's shooting dictates that those who accept an invitation to shoot must also accept that the fixture is set in stone," she writes. Turning tail before the day begins is an "unforgivable breach" of etiquette, but fortunately the crime is self-punishing: "Word swiftly gets around and, to a greater or lesser degree, the miscreants will soon see the rust beginning to set into the lock of their gun cupboards."

Lord Gnome is happy to ensure that word gets round by filling in the details. The shoot was hosted in Berkshire by Tory MP Richard Benyon. Guests included Nicholas Soames, the Earl of Caernarvon, art dealer Dave Kerr – and Sir Max "Hitler" Hastings, who arrived dressed like an advert from *Country Life*.

At a previous shoot Kerr had teased Max a bit; and one thing Hitler Hastings can't abide is being teased. As soon as he spotted Kerr he headed straight back to his car, yelling "I'm off! I'm off!"

Very off indeed. Will anyone ever invite Hitler shooting again?

"LIKE other principles, freedom of speech is only absolute until it is shaped by its context," the *Guardian* declared in a lofty editorial on 3 February. "If free speech is to be meaningful, moreover, the right to it cannot shirk from embracing views that a majority – or a minority – finds distasteful, even on occasion bitterly so."

A few days later, author Michael Dibdin filed his review of *The Righteous Men*, a thriller by debut novelist Sam Bourne, for the *Guardian*'s Saturday Review section. "The novel's spinal column dissolves in a puddle of chicken fat," he observed. "You read on, only out of morbid curiosity… at least really bad writing can be relied upon to throw up those great lines that you don't find anywhere else."

Alas, this particular bit of free speech had its own unique context, for Sam Bourne is in fact the *nom de plume* of *Guardian* columnist and editorial bigwig Jonathan Freedland. Dibdin was informed the paper was not prepared to use his piece because it was "too negative".

***DAILY STAR* editrix Dawn "Miss Whiplash" Neesom has despatched a memo berating her editorial executives for leaving a "dummy caption" on one of the news pages. "We really cannot be this sloppy and the next time it happens the person responsible will, I'm afraid, have to be issued with an official warning."**

Why so cross? Allow Dawn to explain: "If you were the ones woken up by Mr Desmond pointing out your fuck-ups first thing in the morning I'm sure you'd be much more attentive to detail. Do not let it happen again. Ever."

This isn't all that has aroused Dirty Des's legendary wrath recently. He turned apoplectic when a member of IT staff arrived at his office wearing a T-shirt with the slogan FCUK WORK. It seems the Express newspapers boss has an aversion to the F-word – except when used by himself, as it so often is. The normally casually-dressed computer geeks in his empire have now been ordered to wear collars and ties if there's any danger they might encounter the Great Leader.

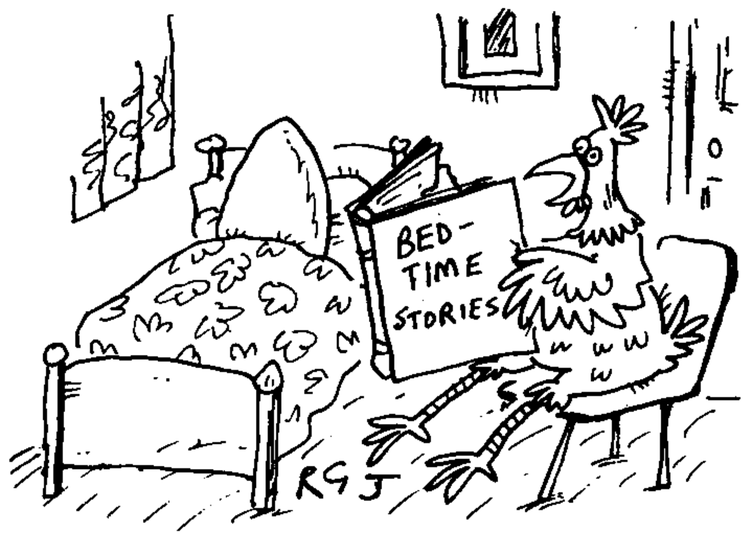
IN "Bags For Life", a cover story in the *Observer* magazine last month, ethical living correspondent Lucy Siegle got to the bottom of "Why we're drowning in packaging".

One answer was all too apparent to readers – the *Observer* issue in question came packaged in a cellophane polybag!

ACCORDING to Cristina Odone in last weekend's *Observer*, the *Daily Mail* has a long record of "doing women down" by encouraging "bitching" and "cattiness" from female columnists.

In the selfsame piece she expresses sympathy for Tobyn Andreae, the *Mail* executive with the "Herculean task" of handling the paper's new Glenda, the "high-maintenance" Allison Pearson. "Two weeks in," Odone reports, "and already Tobyn Andreae's colleagues are full of pity for the executive features editor whose diplomatic skills are being so sorely tested. 'If past experience is anything to go by, La Pearson will show Tobyn that she can out-diva anyone,' claims a former colleague."

Miaow!



"...And Human Looman went into a complete panic, screaming 'The Bird Flu is coming, the Bird flu is coming'..."

***SUN* editor Rebekah Wade's enthusiasm for uncovering criminal activity within loudhailer distance of celebrities continues unabated following her front-page revelation that lottery rapist Iorworth Hoare had bought a house in the same postal district as footballer Alan Shearer (see *Eye* 1150).**

This Monday's front page carried the shocking headline "Wills In Drug Den" over the news that "Prince William and his girlfriend Kate Middleton sat just yards away as a drug deal was stuck in a pub".

Neither the fact that the deal in question involved "a posh student" with no connection to the royal family and, er, a team of *Sun* journalists who had visited the Tunnel House Inn in Cirencester in search of drugs, nor that it took the chump in question a full three hours to come up with the goods (service that would surely warrant a trading standards investigation in any self-respecting genuine drug den) deterred Wade from her mission to reveal the heir to the throne's "huge mistake".

"Clean up your act, William", the paper's editorial thundered – despite the fact that the worst thing the prince appeared to have done was to sit "smiling and chatting and drinking halves of bitter", thus providing a rather better role model than, say, a newspaper editor who drinks herself legless and then spends a night in the police cells for beating up her husband.

JUST FANCY THAT!

AMERICAN cartoon show *South Park* certainly has its priorities right.

An episode featuring the prophet Mohammed as a Muslim super-hero who joins forces with Jesus and Moses has been screened twice on British television without causing the end of the world and can still be seen over the internet.

By contrast, the *South Park* episode which outed a fictional Tom Cruise character as gay – the actor refused to come out of a closet, geddit? – was pulled lest the real actor sued.

WORLD OF SPORT

SELECTED sports hacks have been on the receiving end of some angry phone calls from UK Sport complaining about the *Torygraph*'s resident Sally Jockstrap, Sue Mott.

Is it because of her claim that Britain's drug testing system is in complete disarray, with new chief executive John Steele absent on prolonged sick leave and its head of anti-doping, Andy van Neutegem, quitting his job after less than a year? Is it because Mott ridiculed changes to the government-funded agency's drugs rules as "a charter for cheats"?

No, far worse than that. What infuriated and embarrassed UK Sport was her revelation that the three officials who presided over recent disastrous changes at the quango have effectively awarded themselves £10,000 per year pay hikes!

UK Sport is not the only quango that likes to manipulate reality, to judge by a *Daily Telegraph* piece by Sport England's chief exec, Roger Draper.

Written as the diary of a week in his life, its main purpose is to show how hard Draper works. On the Saturday, he and his sons are in Manchester enjoying an afternoon at the City v United derby, with directors' box seats courtesy of Alistair Mackintosh, Manchester City's chief (presumably still grateful that Sport England footed a £165m bill for the 2002 Commonwealth Games, including the very stadium which Man City now play in). Later in the day, the energetic Draper adds: "Pop into Loughborough on the way home to give a pep talk over dinner to the athletes and team managers representing Team England at the forthcoming Commonwealth Games in Melbourne."

Only one problem: how did he pop in "on the way home" when in fact the meeting in Loughborough was separated from the football match by a matter of seven days?

BETTING SLIP

HOW refreshing to hear a bookmaker calling on the industry to clean up its act, as Betfair recently did.

The betting exchange firm is demanding that the Gambling Commission award new licences exclusively to companies such as Betfair, who are committed to sharing all their client information with the relevant authorities. As its head of legal affairs, Martin Cruddace, declared: "We would hope that full openness is a condition of a bookmaking licence in future."

This, of course, is the Martin Cruddace who was a legal adviser at the *Daily Mirror* during the City Slickers affair. He reassured first the *Mirror*'s management and then the Department of Trade and Industry that there was no hint of impropriety or wrongdoing by financial hacks James Hipwell and Anil Bhoyrul – but forgot to mention that he was himself compromised, having bought shares (and advised his girlfriend, her father and his own mother to do likewise) in three separate companies shortly before they were tipped by the Slickers. This, he later explained, was pure coincidence (see *Eyes* 1148 and 1149).

In February 2003, Cruddace's actions in a court case were described by a judge as "a deliberate attempt to mislead". Who better to lead the campaign for "full openness" in the Augean stables of the betting industry?

LOOKALIKE

CONGRATULATIONS to Richard Littlejohn, who used his *Daily Mail* column to note the resemblance between David Cameron and the android Data from *Star Trek*.

This was a mere three months after Guiseppe Albano made the same point on the Letters page of the *Eye*. Meanwhile celeb mag *Heat* waited a week and a half before devoting nearly half a page to the news that *Big Brother* contestant Pete Burns looked like one of the alien Wraith from *Stargate Atlantis*. *Private Eye* – first with all the celebrity gossip that matters!

HACKWATCH

Glory Be To Pod

WHEN *Guardian* editor Alan Rusbridger was giving interviews ahead of his paper's Berliner relaunch last autumn, he was fond of quoting one of his famous predecessors, C.P. Scott: "A newspaper's primary office is the gathering of news. At the peril of its soul it must see that the supply is not tainted."

Admirable sentiments, but what the *Grauniad* regards as news seems to have changed a bit since Scott's day. Here's a guide to the story that has obsessed the paper for more than two months...

29 November 2005: A small news item is a harbinger of greater things to come. "Ricky Gervais, the comedian behind *The Office* and *Extras*, is returning to radio with a weekly show that will only be available as a podcast through the Guardian Unlimited website... The first of the 12 weekly shows will be available on the GU website next Monday."

1 December: A review of Shure E3C headphones in the *Grauniad*'s Technology section seems innocent enough but hack Charles Arthur can't resist a plug: "All you should hear is the blissful sound of Bach or, of course, a Ricky Gervais podcast downloaded from this newspaper's website from Monday."

3 December: A double whammy. The *Guardian Guide* announces that the world of podcasts "is about to change forever. Hurrah! Because from this Monday, Guardian Unlimited is to podcast 12 exclusive shows from Ricky Gervais". Then GU supremo Emily Bell weighs in with 600 words: "On Monday we have our first major move in breaking new audio ground with the *Guardian* when we podcast 12 new half-hour shows from comedians Ricky Gervais, Stephen Merchant and Karl Pilkington."

12 December: Yet another section of the paper joins the chorus. *Media Guardian* carries a report on the wonders of podcasting – noting that "Ricky Gervais's *Guardian* podcast last week attracted an incredible 130,000 listeners."

14 December: Hold the presses! It's official! "Ricky Gervais has aped Coldplay by topping the charts on both sides of the Atlantic with his new podcast radio show, available exclusively through the *Guardian*'s website," a news (*sic*) story on page 4 reveals. In a fine incestuous feat, *Grauniad* hack Owen Gibson interviews his colleague Emily Bell. "We are delighted to have the Christmas number one on both sides of the Atlantic – the spread of Ricky, Stephen and particularly Karl's popularity throughout the English speaking world is as pleasing as it is inevitable," she discloses. "This has established an important precedent that Guardian Unlimited can host the best original content from the world's most popular performers, in whatever format, and we will be building on this in 2006."

22 December: Time for an end-of-year technology review. And what is the stand-out event? "Ricky Gervais's weekly podcast, available only through the Guardian Unlimited website..."

7 January 2006: In a comment piece, Sheila Pulham argues that "the festive break ushered in a different internet habit". The new habit, amazingly enough, is seeking out "fun stuff, including the fourth of our Ricky Gervais podcasts – perfect for downloading on to all those Christmas iPods".

20 January: You might think that after the first barrage of launch publicity Alan Rusbridger would have ordered his troops to ease off. Some hope! Today feature writer Tim Dowling offers a 2,000-word guide to podcasting and names his "pick of the web". Some clues: it's the "number one podcast on the planet, as everybody knows", and it can be found on Guardian Unlimited.

23 January: Three days since the last mention of the p-word, and readers may be suffering withdrawal symptoms. The Media section comes to the rescue. "In less than two years podcasting has gone from the periphery of the internet to a mainstream digital platform," it reports, "exploited by newspapers, broadcasters and amateur web enthusiasts." Any examples? It seems there's a certain "weekly show on Guardian Unlimited..."

1 February: The cut-and-paste functions of the computers at Farringdon Road are now in overdrive as Cosima Marriner delivers 1,000 words on "the next big thing" in media: podcasting! "Gervais's weekly podcast for the *Guardian* surpassed all expectations," she raves.

7 February: A historic moment, recorded in a front-page photo and a page 3 news story (*sic*). Ricky Gervais "was presented with a certificate yesterday proving he is a world-record breaker for the most downloaded podcast... Gervais picked up his award yesterday, not at the Grosvenor House hotel, but in the public foyer of the *Guardian*'s offices in central London." Which is only right and proper, as the podcast "is available at the *Guardian*'s website".

In his pre-Berliner briefings Rusbridger was fond of invoking another line from CP Scott: "The editor and the business manager should march hand in hand..." He didn't mention the rest of the quote: "...the first, it should be well understood, just an inch or so in advance." Or, as it now appears, the other way round.

LUVVIES

"Gordon's done a brilliant job. Anyone who can forget what it was like under Major is a fool. But Labour need to be brave with the social and moral issues. Tony Blair's a friend. I've said to him, 'You should have waited on Iraq'. He listens."

MICK HUCKNALL
Observer Magazine

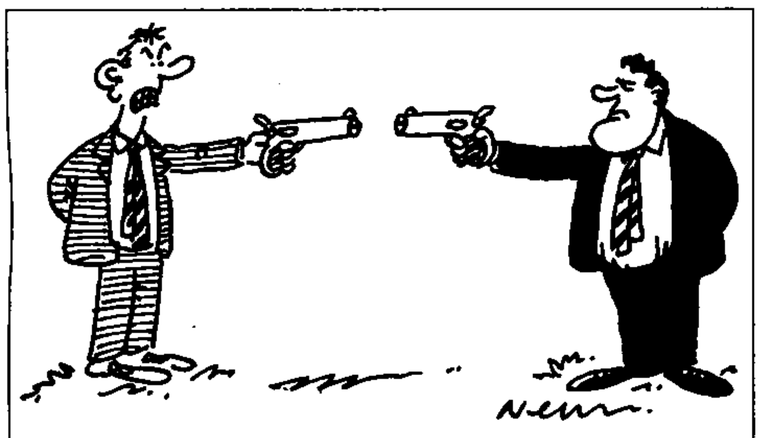
Submitted by David Short.

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

After all the controversy of his head cast in blood and Alison Lapper Pregnant, he's going back to basics.
MARC QUINN SCULPT
At least nobody can accuse him of publicity-seeking this time!
MARC QUINN TO SCULPT KATE MOSS
5 BRONZES IN "EXTREME AND CONTORTED" POSES



Duel Premiership

IS THE time approaching when the Deputy Prime Minister will have to be quietly led away by men in white coats? His grip on reality appears to be ebbing away.

In 2004 John Prescott told the Labour party conference: "Public financing of housing doesn't treat local authorities on a level playing field and I want to see that changed and look at an inquiry into it" [*sic*]. Although expressed in Two Jags's inimitable style, the message was pretty clear. A month later, however, Prezza clarified his statement by declaring that what he had meant to say was that there would be "no inquiry and no level playing field".

This year we have already had Prezza's unfathomable change of mind over whether or not he supports the government's education reforms. Now come further signs his grip on reality is slipping. On 8 February, back on the subject of the public financing of housing, Prezza's office claimed that the 2005 Labour conference "did not vote for the so-called 'fourth option'" of direct government investment in council housing.

In fact the conference voted almost unanimously in favour of the fourth option, agreeing that "the government should provide the fourth option of direct investment in council housing as a matter of urgency."

On hearing of Prezza's latest departure from reality, the chair of the Commons council housing group, Austin Mitchell, summed up the feelings of many: "The ODPM has got so used to bamboozling tenants and councils, that it's now trying to do the same with parliament. The ODPM cannot rewrite facts." No – but that doesn't stop Prezza trying.

FOREWARNED is forearmed, as the Ministry of Defence might say. And MoD officials and services staff appearing before the House of Commons defence select committee are indeed now forearmed – but they have to pretend otherwise.

An eight-page document, containing "guidance" for MoD employees summoned by the committee, has been released following a request under the Freedom of Information Act from the FOIA Centre, a research company. It is one of several notes relating to reforms at the department following the death of Dr David Kelly and the Hutton inquiry.

Under a section headed "Likely Questions", it reveals: "About 48 hours before an oral evidence session, the clerk will normally provide the [defence select committee] liaison officer with an informal steer of the likely areas of questioning. This will usually consist of a simple list of headings."

There's a crucial caveat, however. "It is important to remember that no indication should be given by witnesses on the day that we have been given this steer." Quite so: mustn't shatter the audience's illusions, must we?

ONE story in *New York Times* journalist James Risen's book *State of War* has so far been ignored in the UK: his explanation of how Tony Blair's inner circle knew that President Bush's WMD tales justifying the invasion of Iraq were a sham.

Risen gives a detailed background to the "Downing Street Memo" – the leaked minute of a meeting between Blair and his advisers, published last year in the *Sunday Times*.

According to that minute, the head of MI6 Sir Richard Dearlove told the meeting the "intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy" – the clearest indication that WMD "intelligence" was phoney.

Some commentators have tried to suggest that Dearlove was merely relaying gossip or talking off-the-cuff. But Risen's book makes clear that the head of MI6 made his comments after being thoroughly briefed by the CIA.

Dearlove attended a CIA-MI6 summit in the US on 20 July 2002, three days before his meeting with Blair. According to Risen and his CIA sources, the Americans wanted to cancel the meeting. "The British were very insistent, however, and kept pushing… the former CIA official said," writes Risen. "The MI6 officials made it very clear to their CIA counterparts that they had to sit down and talk immediately."

CIA chief George Tenet agreed to talk; and Risen adds: "During the Saturday summit, Tenet and Dearlove left the larger meeting and went off by themselves for about an hour and a half, according to a former senior CIA official who attended the summit".

The fact that Dearlove made his comments about fixing intelligence to Blair so soon afterwards gives a clear indication of the overall meaning of the CIA-MI6 briefing. Risen's source suggests Tenet told Dearlove the intelligence was far from strong.

WHY WOULD Jim Knight, the Minister for Rural Affairs, Landscape and Diversity, be trying to persuade the Countryside Agency (for which he has responsibility) to withdraw its objections to the controversial Weymouth Relief Road?

The agency is doing no more than endorse the objections of a wealth of conservation groups, including English Nature, the Woodland Trust, the Council for the Protection of Rural England, Friends of the Earth and Transport 2000. They are all horrified that the road will cut through an area of outstanding natural beauty, devastate the largest concentration or iron age barrows in Europe, destroy an area of ancient woodland and interfere with an area of special scientific interest. Not only that, but the relief road would by-pass a stretch of road that does not suffer an exceptionally high level of traffic.

Government policy is supposed to avoid destroying protected areas for the sake of the car, if it can. But Mr Knight clearly sees no conflict of interest when he writes on his constituency website: "The by-pass has been my top priority for Weymouth since I was first selected to fight South Dorset over ten years ago. Having previously persuaded three previous roads minister to back the scheme it feels very familiar but I've been back on the phones lobbying regional politicians and officials to give the road the priority it deserves."

Good to know Britain's historic and rural heritage can be so easily signed away so Mr Knight can keep his seat...

THE National Audit Office's (NAO) discovery that the Home Office has been controlling its finances with the aplomb of a badly run Christmas club emerged too late to stymie the appointment of the civil servant who presided over the mess, permanent secretary and "accounting officer" Sir John Gieve, to the Bank of England's monetary policy committee (MPC).

But why did the report – unprecedented in not vouching for a government department's figures – come out so late? The delay arose because, under Gieve, the Home Office didn't submit its draft 2004/05 accounts to the NAO until September, more than two months late. A further draft, showing wildly different figures and adjustments of £946m for missing cash, only appeared in December. In the meantime, on 17 October, it had been announced that Gieve would join the Bank this January. Last month he duly got his feet safely under the table before the NAO report could come out. Once again the top man escaped, career undamaged (and knighthood in the bag).

But why was Gieve such an enthusiastic applicant for the top job at the Treasury last summer when he would surely have known that his financial mismanagement at the Home Office would deeply embarrass the government when it became public knowledge? Just the kind of cove the MPC needs.

PRIMAROLO AND PROPER

IN THE run-up to this week's parliamentary vote, ministers did everything they could to highlight the dangers of identity theft and so bolster the case for ID cards. But when the crime exposed the government's inept handling of the tax credits fiasco, their silence was eloquent.

So far the identities of 11,000 Department of Work and Pensions and Network Rail staff are known to have been stolen as part of organised tax credit frauds already running into tens of millions – and bound to increase. Yet the minister responsible, Paymaster-General Dawn Primarolo, appears to be doing everything she can to avoid scrutiny of the scandal.

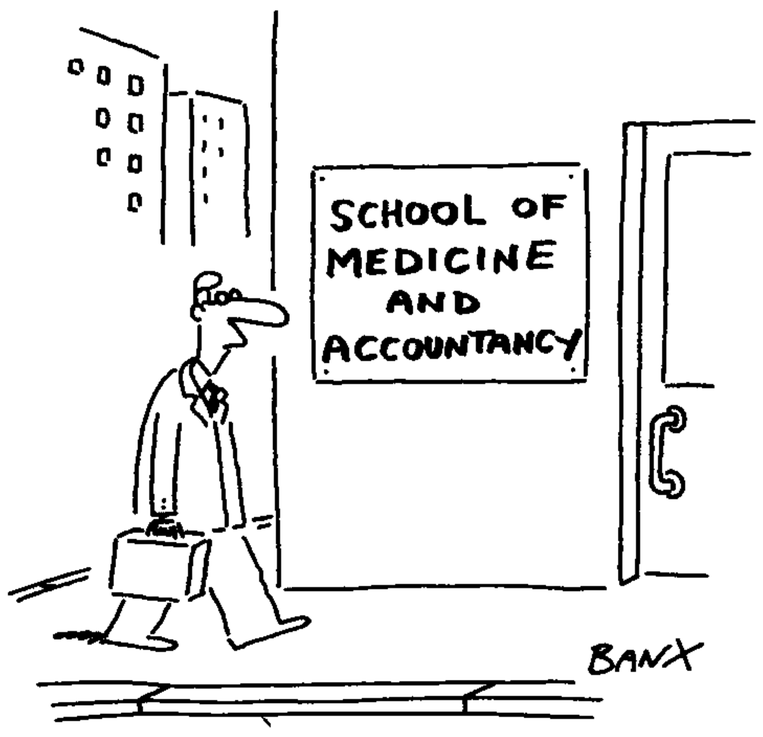
The decision to stop claims through the internet (the fraudsters' preferred route) was slipped out in a press release one Friday before Christmas. And despite promises to keep MPs informed, she hasn't appeared in the House to discuss the issue since Treasury question time on 8 December (when she was typically evasive). In the meantime the number of suspect claims known about has doubled.

The best chance MPs have had to pin Primarolo down came with her appearance before parliament's Treasury sub-committee two weeks ago. Chairman Michael Fallon MP asked whether enough was done to prevent the crimes: "When was it first reported to you as minister that HMRC were concerned about fraud?" Primarolo explained that "What became clear in late November was that there was substantial suspected identity fraud in the system."

This answer surprised one member of the committee, Lorely Burt, who thought it contradicted a written reply the minister had given to her fellow Lib Dem MP and party work and pensions spokesman David Laws in January: "Over the last 12 months HMRC has detected an increase in the number of organised attacks on the tax credits system, predominantly via the internet. HMRC continued to monitor the situation closely and updated me in June 2005."

So at the end of the meeting Burt asked the Primarolo to "confirm that you had no awareness of any level of serious organised fraud before late November 2005". Very tetchy by this stage, Primarolo insisted: "No, I never said that. I think it is quite clear. What I suggest you do is read the record..."

The *Eye* and others have now read the record, and it's clear Primarolo did claim she only knew about organised ID frauds days before the portal was shut in early December, thus conveniently side-stepping any questions about whether she acted quickly enough. And if the "organised attacks" she previously admitted to knowing about six months before involved ID theft, then she seriously misled parliament – a distinct possibility as HMRC staff have been reporting ID theft for many months.



DEPARTMENT OF WEALTH

HEALTH ministers have been warned that new plans to centralise control of funding for health research will pitch university medical schools and hospitals against each other, driving some out of business, and seriously add to the financial crisis engulfing the NHS.

The warning came from health academics in the *British Medical Journal*, who are concerned that the "Best Research for Best Health" strategy aimed at attracting more investment from the biomedical industry and opening it up to market competition will mean even less independent scientific and health research.

Under government plans, the Department of Health's £680m research budget will go into a centrally controlled pot under the new National Institute for Health Research (NIHR), along with any additional funds that pay for clinical academic appointments. Funds will then be allocated on a competitive basis into research that more meets the needs of the pharmaceutical companies; and £100m will be earmarked for five academic centres at the "top" research hospitals.

The current industry view is that the number of trials in the UK is too low and the UK regulatory system makes them slow and expensive. The new NIHR is supposed to speed up the process for approving trials and gathering patient data and other information. So to satisfy the industry, our universities and hospitals lose both their control over staff appointments and their funds – and effectively their independent research strategy. It is likely that a large number around the country will be pushed out of the research market altogether. At a time when there is already huge concern that the big pharma companies control the bulk of research, the government seems determined to hand them the rest.

As the *BMJ* asks: "What will become of drug research which is of no commercial interest to the pharmaceutical industry such as highly successful public trials of aspirin for cardiovascular disease and magnesium sulphate for eclampsia?" The *BMJ* authors, led by Prof Allyson Pollock, director of Edinburgh University's Centre for International Public Health Policy, points out that much of the NHS research budget also supports clinical services – particularly at the teaching hospitals. To withdraw this bulk funding at a time when hospitals are already in deficit and facing an uncertain future, as income to NHS hospitals is being eroded by the new "payment by result" system, and payments to PFI and private providers, could be catastrophic.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"And anyone who responds with a sentence beginning with the words 'I believe in free speech but...' is as self-deluding as those who write letters to newspapers beginning 'I am no racist, but...'"

– **Dominic Lawson**, *Independent*, 7 February, page 27.

"I believe in free speech, but..."

– **David Cameron**, news report, *Independent*, 7 February, page 9.

IN THE COURTS

NOTHING, it seems, will deter the wide-boys at KPGM from trying to get out of parting with their money. But luckily the courts are still able to exercise higher standards of moral probity.

First of all the House of Lords has thrown out KPMG's final attempt to try to wriggle out of paying its former staff the full pensions they were expecting, leaving the firm with a whopping £88m bill. Secondly, the high court has ditched the firm's breathtaking ruse to get out of the lease of its former London HQ at Puddle Dock, which it moved into at the end of the 1970s under its former manifestation, Peat Marwick Mitchell.

Eager to evade its obligations to pay rent for the next 25 years, KPMG, to its joy, was able to find a mistake, buried in a mountain of paperwork of nearly 30 years ago, made when a secretary typing up the documents inadvertently left out 23 words. As if by magic, the effect of leaving out of the words suddenly gave KPMG, it said, *extra* rights to bring the lease to an end. After a lengthy legal battle, the high court has decided that KPMG knew perfectly well at the time it was not getting these rights and held that the missing words must be reinstated.

Chairman Mike Rake proudly declares on the KPMG website that "the values and principles on which we work are widely respected". Oh yeah?

HIGH PRINCIPALS

GOOGLE isn't the only organisation willing to kowtow to Chinese censorship – Salford University called off a diplomacy roleplaying game tackling a crisis over Taiwan to avoid causing offence this month.

Dr Paddy Griffith was booked to run the game for postgraduate students of contemporary history, after running successful games focusing on Japan and Indonesia in previous years. He sent out briefing packs to the participants to bring them up to speed on developments between Taiwan and China (including the recent panda propaganda incident, in which China gave two giant pandas to Taipei zoo as a "goodwill gesture" which was condemned by the Taiwanese government as a popularity stunt). The briefing also included two weeks of fictional developments, bringing about the crisis the students needed to roleplay.

Chinese students who had received copies of the briefing complained to the university about the content of the game – so the university pulled the plug.

Why so willing to throw away free speech and pander (groan) to such sensitivities about Taiwanese independence? A spokeswoman told the *Eye*: "We are committed to promoting equality and diversity and to ensuring that our programmes do not alienate or cause offence to any of our diverse student population."

Salford, like many UK universities, has been raking in the cash from Chinese students over the past few years (it has more than 500, around half its non-European intake). Maybe some diplomacy games would teach them not to capitulate so

MAN IN THE EYE

LORD BALLYEDMOND

MULTIMILLIONAIRE pharmaceuticals magnate Lord Ballyedmond (aka Dr Edward Haughey) is no stranger to the law courts.

The Ulster Unionist peer's latest wheeze is threatening to sue residents opposing a planning application over a pub car park in Cumbria, for libel. The car park, part of a plan to add a restaurant to the Queen Inn, owned by Lord Ballyedmond's company Norbrook Laboratories, would use land near the playing field in the village of Great Corby, near Haughey's home at Corby Castle.

Seventy objections have been received by the council, which is to make a decision in March. Many of those objections to the plan were ready-written letters, which unidentified campaigners posted through the doors of residents, to be signed and sent off to the council. Lawyers for Norbrook Laboratories wrote to those objectors saying that the letter was defamatory and that unless the objections were withdrawn, they would "seek the appropriate remedies in court". Several villagers have now been frightened enough to withdraw their objections.

Lord Ballyedmond hasn't had a great deal of success in the courts.

- Last year he lost a legal battle after he tried to claim adverse possession of a £300,000 cottage adjoining his other home at Ballyedmond Castle in County Down. The cottage's owner was living in Scotland and had to go to court to prove the cottage was his.
- Housekeeper Linda Heaton, who was so afraid of Haughey that she hid in a laundry cupboard, gamekeeper Tommy Ridley who was fired over false allegations of poaching, and farm manager Tim Bealby have all won industrial tribunals against his lordship since 1998.
- In 2000 he tried to force a sports club in County Down to demolish its new changing rooms, claiming he had a covenant on the land to stop them building. He hadn't – and ended up paying the club's £50,000 legal bill.
- District Judge Richard Holloway once accused him of trying to get into the *Guinness Book of Records* by raising the rent on Great Corby village hall from the traditional 5p to £1,500 a year.
- In 1996 he failed in a legal attempt to force Irish satirical magazine *The Phoenix* to hand over its sources for a story about his holiday chalet.

Even with such a track record, however, the villagers in Great Corby shouldn't have to fear libel actions over their democratic right to take part in the planning process.

Number crunching

£1bn ■ "Bilateral" assistance from UK to African countries, 2005/06

£1.11bn ■ "Bilateral" debt repayments to UK from African countries, 2005/06

[*Parliamentary answer by Treasury Minister Ivan Lewis, 1 February 2006*]

BAD LUCK CORNER

ON 1 FEBRUARY George Hollingbery, defeated Tory general election candidate in Winchester, takes his wife and two children out for an early evening meal.

They book a table at the Winchester middle class's favourite restaurant – Pizza Express – and climb the stairs to the large, oak-beamed room overlooking the River Itchen.

There is only one other table occupied. Sitting at it is the man who defeated Hollingbery last June – Mark Oaten, with his family. Rictus smiles and pizza margheritas all round!

DOING THE ROUNDS

Swallow that

THE revelation, courtesy of the Commission for Social Care Inspection, that the elderly are given the wrong drugs in half of all care homes could be seen as progress.

When left to their own devices, only a third of patients take their tablets properly. This long-standing problem has been compounded of late by the absurd number of pills elderly patients have to pop so GPs can hit the government's targets and send their children to public school.

Targets do at least concentrate the mind; but as Peter Winocour, a consultant NHS diabetologist, puts it[1]: "Targets are often impractical and involve taking too many drugs... 10% of type 2 diabetics could require two or three hypoglycaemic agents (ultimately including insulin), at least three antihypertensive agents, two hypolipidaemic agents, and aspirin. A high proportion will also require treatment for coexistent cardiovascular disease and coincidental unrelated chronic disease. It is difficult to see how we can realistically expect patients to comply for long with such a draconian regimen requiring so many separate drugs."

To illustrate the point, a GP has written to the *Eye* about an elderly woman who was expected to take 20 tablets of 16 different drugs spaced out over four different time intervals. "One of the drugs was warfarin, to reduce the risk of stroke, which interacted with a lot of the other drugs and required regular blood tests (INRs) to get the correct dose. However, the INR was wildly variable and we couldn't get the dose of warfarin right. It later transpired that instead of adhering to her absurdly complicated drug regime, she'd tipped all sixteen bottles of tablets into a basket and swallowed twenty at random each day, figuring out it would all even up in the end."

Given the increasing pill burden of the elderly (as we try to keep them well enough to travel to Switzerland and end their lives), care home staff need more than training to get the tablets right, they need someone with the time to do nothing else all day but dish them out.

[1] *Winocour P. Effective diabetes care: a need for realistic targets. BMJ 2002;324:1577-80.*

Not all Wight

GP targets don't just involve the over-prescription of drugs, but also ordering expensive tests. For example, target LVD 2 states that "90 percent of patients with coronary heart disease diagnosed with left ventricular dysfunction after 1 April 2003 should have an echocardiogram."

Unsurprisingly there has been a surge in echo ordering from GPs which has evoked an interesting response from Graham Elderfield, chief executive of the Isle of Wight NHS trust. "In primary care I am still seeing examples of unnecessary referrals into secondary care for tests which are not clinically necessary but just to satisfy the Quality and Outcomes Framework (ie targets). These unnecessary referrals cost time and money our system doesn't have." Alas, Health Secretary Patsy Hewitt argues that QoF activity is clinically necessary to drive up standards. So who's telling the truth?

Under pressure

TARGET CHD 6 of the QoF framework states that the blood pressure of 70 percent of CHD patients should be less than 150/90 in the last 15 months. Nearly all GPs claimed to have hit this target, but how many really did?

As one cardiac specialist put it: "No-one really knows, but some GPs have told me they either deliberately under measured or used an inappropriately large cuff and got the patient to breath deeply to bring the blood pressure down." Software has now been developed to try to spot anomalously low readings but a more honest approach might be to use BP machines with a visual display so the patient can read it too and check its been entered correctly (before picking up his prescription for 20 pills a day). That's progress.

M.D.

off your trolley

REEVE & WAY

NOW MR JONES, WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN TOLD?
WE CAN'T HAVE YOU WANDERING AROUND, NOW GET BACK TO BED...
BEFORE ANOTHER DEPARTMENT'S PATIENT GETS IT
THERE YOU GO, MR SMITH
TOO LATE

SIGNAL FAILURES

BY THE warped logic that keeps Network Rail's (NR) borrowing off Gordon Brown's books, British Rail must have been a private company too.

When "new" Labour created NR to take over from Railtrack, Brown pretended it was a private company because NR's debt – due to exceed £20bn by 2009 – would otherwise have blotted his balance sheets. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) supported his pretence, although the National Audit Office didn't.

Now even the ONS seems to accept the financial situation doesn't justify NR's private classification, when NR is funded mainly through government grants and government-guaranteed borrowing (and relies more on public cash than BR did!) So the ONS has concocted another excuse for staying loyal to its master.

Colin Mowl, the ONS's macroeconomics director, told the *Times*: "What... matters for this purpose is not the degree of government financial support for NR but who controls general corporate policy, and that control clearly lies with NR itself."

Whoops! Last year "new" Labour passed legislation giving itself even closer control over rail expenditure. It is due to produce a "high level output specification" next year – instructing NR what to do with the infrastructure. In fact the government now has tighter control over railways than ever before, including during both world wars. BR was given an annual subsidy and left to spend it as it saw fit. Its major investment schemes were often scaled back because of treasury short-sightedness, but at least the schemes were devised by professional rail managers. Today the impetus for new major upgrades has to come from the government, so there aren't any.

THE original franchises went to the lowest-cost bidders, followed by big bailouts as business plans flopped. So today's franchise deals are more robust. Or are they?

In April GNER started its second franchise, which it won by promising to pay nearly £2bn to the state over 10 years (ie it was the lowest-cost bidder). Already its business plan is in tatters because rail regulators decided there wasn't enough capacity for the extra Leeds services specified in GNER's franchise deal. So GNER may already require a change to its contract, which reflects stunning government incompetence even by "new" Labour standards.

FIRSTGROUP, Britain's biggest bus firm, must realise that passengers, transport officials, councillors and MPs are so upset by its ludicrous fare rises (*Eyes passim*) it would lose out if buses were regulated.

It reacted bitterly last month when transport chiefs began a study of bus-regulation options in south Yorkshire, where WorstGroup raised fares four times in a year. In a press release attacking the study as a "distraction", FirstGroup's Nicola Shaw said: "People are understandably concerned about fares rises in Sheffield. The reality is that they have only matched our costs increases. Whoever ran the buses would face the same pressures." Really?

In the year to December 2005 the cost of a typical five-mile journey in south Yorkshire rose 3 percent on Yorkshire Traction buses and 29 percent on FirstGroup buses. In west Yorkshire, a typical five-mile bus journey costs 33 percent more on FirstGroup than Arriva, following fare rises of 18 and 7 percent respectively since December 2004.

If WorstGroup's costs really have risen so much more than Yorkshire Traction's or Arriva's, the company is mismanaged. If they haven't, Shaw is bullshitting. Either way FirstGroup has bolstered the case for regulation and its eviction from much of Yorkshire.

'Dr B. Ching'

THE COMMUTERS
OH NO! PLEASE DON'T MAKE ME GIVE UP MY NICE COMFY SEAT!
I DON'T WANT TO STAND SQUASHED LIKE A SARDINE FOR TWO HOURS
BUT IT'S TIME TO CATCH OUR TRAIN HOME...
SRIZELDA

FTVE

Question Time Special (BBC1)

IT'S probably a good thing Sir Robin Day is dead. If he wasn't, the sight on the *Question Time* panel of someone famous for playing a teenager on *Coronation Street* would have killed him off.

Even though it's been apparent for some time that the BBC's premier current affairs discussion show has gone from a programme which would regard Ian McCartney MP as a good guest to one whose ultimate booking would be Heather McCartney, the appearance of Adam Rickit was still a shock.

But getting the young luvvie's tuppenceworth on the great issues of the day is in line with the current BBC news policy of "reaching out" to the "wider audience" which finds politics boring. Other manifestations of this obsession with "accessibility" are that Andrew Marr is now as likely to interview a celebrity chef as a cabinet minister on his Sunday show and that Marr's successor, Nick Robinson, keeps a blokey "blog" for BBC online.

Even so, there are some public service obligations which the BBC finds impossible to duck; and so, last week, a **Question Time Special** from Harlow lined up the three surviving candidates to replace Charlie Kennedy.

In recent years, *QT* has preferred to have five panellists with at least one from showbiz but, owing to the regrettable failure of any of the cast of *Hollyoaks* to be elected to parliament in the Lib Dem interest, and the fact that the party's only quizshow regular had caused the leadership contest by getting pissed, the programme was stuck for the first time since its earliest days with an all-MP panel.

Terrified by this realisation, they started with a hopeless "come on down" moment, in which Sir Ming, Simon and Chris ran on to the stage. And, hoping to hold on to the audience for as long as possible, they started with questions about Kennedy's drinking and Simon Hughes's forced declaration of homosexuality rather than risk too early on a showdown over renewable fuel alternatives.

There was a terrible piece of attempted populism from Sir Ming when, pressed on whether it was enough to be a "safe pair of hands" as leader, he stuttered: "Well, who has the safest pair of hands in Britain? Freddie Flintoff!" Apart from the oddness of a Scot praising the English (not British) cricket team, this was bonkers because catching is the thing Flintoff is least famous for.

But this warning against trying to court the mass audience seemed to be learned by the programme, which settled down into a decently serious and even commendably dull debate on taxation and European policy. Although the producers had clearly chosen the wrong night – by recording before the Dunfermline polls closed, they missed by hours one of the biggest stories in Lib Dem history – but at least it was almost as if the programme were taking politics seriously again. What a relief that Dimbers never had to say: "Adam Rickit, where do you stand on proportional representation?"

Of course, the execs will say that you can't do this kind of thing very often: all a bit BBC4 and the corporation has a duty to reach out to the wider audience which finds politics boring. But hang on a minute. *Question Time* is a fascinating parable in the pointlessness of populism in certain areas of programming. The presumable aim of adding extra guests and booking soap stars was to raise the audience. So the viewing figures for recent editions of *Question Time* tell a striking story.

For several years, its core audience has been around 2.5 million, with occasional leaps into the threes and fours if a beleaguered prime minister is appearing or 9/11 or 7/7 has just happened. These figures are terrifyingly low in BBC1 terms – a drama or entertainment show with those scores would be axed immediately – and so you can see why a BBC1 controller would attempt to raise it with jokier or soapier guests.

Yet, on 26 January, the Adam Rickit night, the audience was 2.6 million with a 16.6 percent share. The following week, 2 February, the first full day of the Mohamed cartoons spat, but without an *EastEnders* or *Emmerdale* actor on the panel, the total was down to 2.5m but the larger share (19.7 percent) indicates that the total "viewing pool" was down. On 9 February, the triple Lib Dem edition, the show dropped to an average of 2m.

What can we conclude from this? The audience for serious current affairs programmes on BBC1 is about two million, pretty much what it has been throughout the multi-channel era. Bringing in some bloke from the Rover's Return brings an increase so small as to be statistically insignificant. The programme is immune to "soap bounce". However, even 20 percent of the core political viewing audience is so bored by the prospect of the Scots one, the gay one and the clever one in debate over the future of Liberal Democracy that they turn in early.

The lesson is clear: as only the serious political audience is going to watch, why not just make the programmes for them and hope that the next Lib Dem leadership race doesn't happen for a few years? Now, loves, who's going to ring Babs Windsor, Chantelle and Pete Doherty and tell them that they won't be needed on *Question Time* after all?

'Remote Controller'

Manhunters BBC2 9pm
Based on real eye-witness accounts, tonight's dramatisation is based in Njombe, Tanzania, in 1946. A pride of loins has terrorised the district for seven years.

Daily Mirror TV guide

AD NAUSEAM

IF YOU'RE at a loss for something to do in the cold snap, here's a mini-break to lift the soul: *Marketing Week*'s "Kids 2006, 6-12s" two-day conference on 27/8 February.

Speakers from Walkers Crisps, Chupa Chups lollies and Heinz will help you "Uncover psychologies, motivations and cultural evolutions to capture the time thrifty kid." Highlight of the conference is special guest speaker Matthew Hill, aged nine, who no doubt will be getting his fair share of the £1,408.83 per person it costs to attend.

If anyone were in any doubt as to the purpose of the gathering, a letter accompanying the booking form reads: "The era of commercialism, which has witnessed the aggressive corporate seduction of kids, is coming to an end. In its place comes an increasing governmental and societal backlash that suggests the dawning of a more subtle and gentle approach – *but one which must still deliver strong margin growth*."

In other words, there's still filthy lucre to be made from pester power, even at a time when child obesity is out of control. "Be ahead of the pack," the blurb concludes, "and find out NOW how to realign your brand before legislation forces you to." How edifying that the industry's response is to "realign brands" rather than, say, stop targeting children.

LAST ISSUE's Ad Nauseam on rank plagiarism in advertising noted how Clemmow Hornby Inge's latest campaign for the Toyota Yaris was bizarrely similar to TBWA's launch work for the Nissan Micra in early 2003.

Both used neologisms to suggest that their small cars were all things to all men, with Toyota opting for "bigsmall" while Nissan came up with "smig". A number of readers have pointed out to us that Johnny Hornby, now one of CHI's managing partners, was previously a managing director at TBWA.

LUVVIES

"Every movie soaks into you for a certain amount of time. It's like growing a beard: tiny steps, little growth. Suddenly your beard is whacked off and you say, 'Fuck me! I'm naked!' You can no longer rely on the world that you have created. The rug has been pulled from under you and suddenly there's... nothing."

JOAQUIN PHOENIX
Guardian

Submitted by Andrew Blackman.

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

DICK AND DOM IN DA BUNGALOW
WHERE THEY SPEND TWO HOURS ON A SATURDAY MORNING...
LETTING US KNOW...
THAT THEY'VE NOTHING UPSTAIRS
Ken Pyne

MEDIA NEWS

AS CREATOR of ITV's *X-Factor*, Simon Cowell has probably inflicted more talentless hopefuls on the nation than anyone else in history. But interviewed by Terry Wogan on UK Gold this week, he was very critical of one wannabe in particular: "There's a fame epidemic all over the world. Just look at that THING that won *Big Brother*, 'Champagne' or whatever she calls herself."

Could Cowell's rancour in any way be related to *Big Brother* winner Chantelle Houghton's falling-out with his close friend and PR representative Max Clifford, whom she dumped in favour of rival agent John Noel? Having agreed with Houghton's mother to represent her during her sojourn in the *Big Brother* house, Clifford briefed newspapers that he had lined up a number of projects for her when she finally emerged – including an appearance in *OK!*, a mobile phone advert and, er, "discussing television projects over dinner with Simon Cowell".

THE BBC's "Value for Money" initiative is threatening thousands of staff with redundancy. But there is one ray of sunshine.

The corporation is to boost the budget of its digital Asian Network (audience reach: 0.3%) by £1m, creating 20 new posts.

Meanwhile, editors of flagship current affairs programmes on Radio Four (audience reach 11.8% – 30 times higher) such as *File on Four* are begging for enough money to maintain current staff levels and to fund their award winning investigations.

Radio Four's entire current affairs staff currently amounts to 80. The Asian Network will expand to 85.

"MARK Thompson is getting tough over diversity. He is demanding that targets must be met for increasing the numbers of staff from ethnic minorities and with disabilities – and any director who fails to deliver will not get an annual bonus."

So says an extraordinary report in the BBC's internal propaganda rag, *Ariel*. Ethnic and disabled staff who assumed they had been hired because of their abilities, rather than their manager's desire to trouser extra cash, are furious. And to add insult to injury, Thompson assured sceptical journalists that "this is not about lowering standards".

Equally angry are those staffers who for reasons of a lack of ethnicity or disability will fail to enrich their bosses. And they wonder how far the rationale for compulsory redundancy will be determined by the same "diversity priority". Union lawyers predict a field day when the validity of BBC redundancies are tested in the courts.

HEARTS and Minds, a weekly political programme broadcast in Northern Ireland, celebrated its 10th anniversary with a cake, used as a festive on-air prop. This was then consumed by the cast and crew.

The cake was claimed as an expense by the poor producer who had bought it. The BBC then refused the claim because the said cake was clearly a taxable benefit and the producer had failed to supply the staff numbers of all those who had had a bite.

DUMB BRITAIN

The Weakest Link, BBC2

Anne Robinson: He was known as the King of the Cowboys. He was Roy who?

Contestant: Keane.

Robinson: Which ship sailed, in 1831, on a round-the-world voyage with Charles Darwin aboard?

Contestant: The Marie-Rose Celeste.

Sara Cox show, Radio 1

Sara Cox: What was Bram Stoker's most famous creation?

Contestant: Branston Pickle.

DUMB AMERICA

Beauty and the Geek, WBDC, Washington DC

Presenter: Name the capital of Iraq.

Contestant: Can you spell that please?

Presenter: I-R-A-Q.

Contestant: What was the question again?

Presenter: Name the capital of Iraq.

Contestant: Afghanistan?

BBC Global News boss Richard Sambrook was being somewhat economical with the truth when he told the *Independent* last month that the forthcoming launch of the BBC's new Arabic TV channel was "the BBC's first foreign language television service".

The BBC famously set up an Arabic channel in the early 1990s. When it was subsequently closed down (after its Rome-based partner Orbit TV, run by a Saudi prince, objected to transmitting a *Panorama* critical of Saudi Arabia) many of its staff move to a new upstart, Al-Jazeera.

Mandarin followed – until Murdoch bought the Star satellite and pulled the plug – and then Hindi, which also failed to survive, in India. The BBC has also run a Japanese TV service since 1994. Time for Sambrook to brush up on his facts?

GOING LIVE

"WE'RE not moving away from these pictures because they are a fairly accurate representation of the fact that Sion Jenkins is about to emerge," said Matthew Amroliwala on BBC News 24, condemning viewers to a cavalcade of pointless shots – the backs of people's heads and snappers having a fag, taken by a camera clearly being moved back by the police – for 10 whole minutes.

ANYONE intrigued by the protests over the Danish cartoons who wishes to find out more about the central tenets of the Islamic faith could do worse than get hold of a copy of *The Life of Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him)*.

This 15-minute animation and accompanying "full-colour book featuring beautiful images from the programme" is aimed at Key Stage 2 pupils (7-12 year olds) and is available from all good educational bookshops.

The film, one of ten in the "Animated World Faiths" series which also tells the life stories of such figures as Jesus Christ, the Buddah, Confucius and Guru Nanak, was first broadcast as part of Channel 4's schools programming in 1998 and has been regularly repeated ever since, most recently on digital channel Teachers TV, without any outrage being expressed by anyone.

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

SO. Farewell then Andante.com, tipped at its birth in America five years ago to be the mother of all serious-music websites and great news for the classical industry.

With a real staff and money, international clout and good design, it was a substantial online magazine and the antithesis of the spare-bedroom efforts that had preceded it. For classical music to have a future, it had to have a significant online presence. And this was it. Or not, as it turned out.

The other week the site was closed down by its relatively new Parisian record-label owner Naïve, which pulled the plug for financial reasons you might have guessed if you'd tried to access Andante during the past few months. It was persistently in technical trouble and disappeared entirely during much of December, leaving thousands of visitors around the world wondering what was up. No doubt they'll miss it.

There won't be so many tears among the music critics and feature-writers whose work appeared onscreen, however. Much of the time they didn't get paid. And much of the time they didn't even know their work was being used until they saw it staring them in the face. The truth is, Andante had a nice line in piracy, blatantly stealing writers' work from print magazines and newspapers without a by-your-leave. When the writers found out, Andante's usual response was to claim that it had a blanket licensing deal with the publication and could do what it liked. When this proved false, Andante then said: OK sue us – but as we're in the US and you're in Europe, it will cost you infinitely more money and trouble than the royalty payment you'll receive could ever justify. And on that outrageously arrogant basis, they got away with it, time and again.

Andante's collapse is therefore a kind of justice. But the fact that even an outfit as bullish and crooked as Andante couldn't make classical music pay on the internet, doesn't bode well for anybody else.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

SWEET & STOUR

ANGER in Essex over plans for the Horkesley Park "heritage centre" – a 100,000 sq ft garden centre with 1,125-seat café in Constable country which claims as its prime objectives the celebration of the English countryside and the work of the Nation's Favourite Painter.

There won't be any original Constables for the projected 750,000 annual visitors to peruse, but there will be plenty of interactive screens, ye olde farming exhibits and plenty of, er, traditional retail opportunities.

Objections to the planning application, which goes before Colchester Borough Council next month, have concentrated on the increase in traffic and the packaging and commercialisation of Essex's only area of outstanding natural beauty. Many are puzzled why, in this "celebration" of Englishness, it was necessary to include a classical Chinese garden in the style of the Qing dynasty. Shurely not necessary to an appreciation of the landscape that inspired "Flatford Mill" and "The Haywain"?

All is revealed in a letter from Lord Hanningfield, Tory leader of Essex County Council, to the chairman of the Stour Valley Action Group, which opposes the scheme. The Chinese garden, he writes, was included at the request of the county council, which wishes to strengthen trading relations with China in general and Jiangsu Province in particular, with which ECC has signed a "memorandum of agreement".

Perhaps if "The Cornfield" was renamed "The Rice Paddy" everyone would be happy.

SIR ROBIN WAL-MART

NEWHAM'S elected mayor Sir Robin Wales has pioneered a number of daft schemes, including giving under-trained park wardens police powers (*Eye* 1143). But none has annoyed locals more than a plan to demolish the much-loved, 100-year-old Queen's Market in Upton Park and replace it with an Asda.

The lively market consists of 60 small shops and 80 stalls serving fresh, very cheap fruit and veg, including many exotic varieties, and other goods to East End people of all hues and views. But Newham council wants to lease the site to developer St Modwen, sweeping away the existing market and replacing it with an Asda and 220 luxury flats.

Although the council says the number of stalls will not be reduced, and that the developers have agreed to freeze pitch fees for "a few years", services charges will "need to reflect the actual costs of maintaining a quality environment". Small traders take this to mean that they will be priced out in a new, characterless and ethnically cleansed market.

Local campaigners, the Friends of Queen's Market, have had their planning objections and 12,000-signature petition dismissed out of hand by Sir Robin, who describes the group as "an overtly political campaign that has spread outright lies".

Asda, meanwhile, is described by the council as "an established Yorkshire-based company that has developed several community initiatives and is one of the main sponsors of the Children in Need appeal". Nothing about the fact that the chain is actually a subsidiary of Wal-Mart corp, America's biggest retailer, criticised by the GMB union for "riding roughshod over worker's rights". But as Sir Robin declared in the Newham council magazine: "Misinformation and conspiracy theories usually abound whenever regeneration and development are proposed".

● DONCASTER council means business when it warns parents not to take their children out of school for holidays during term time. It fined single mother Tracey Hindson £50 for allowing her parents to take her two children for a rare week's holiday in Spain last September. And student Sharon Whitnall, who cannot afford the "astronomical" cost of going away in school holidays, also took her children away for a week. Her fine of £50 was compounded when she missed the payment deadline. She was taken to court, where her fine and costs amounted to £200, which she is now paying off at £10 a week.

Readers may recall how in 2004 the elected mayor of Doncaster, Martin Winter, boasted of having taken his children both to the Glastonbury festival and to the European football finals during term time (*Eye* 1111). Winter declared there were some things you can't learn in a classroom, adding: "It's not just about pen, paper and books." Education officials have decided that their boss, unlike impoverished single mums, should not be penalized.

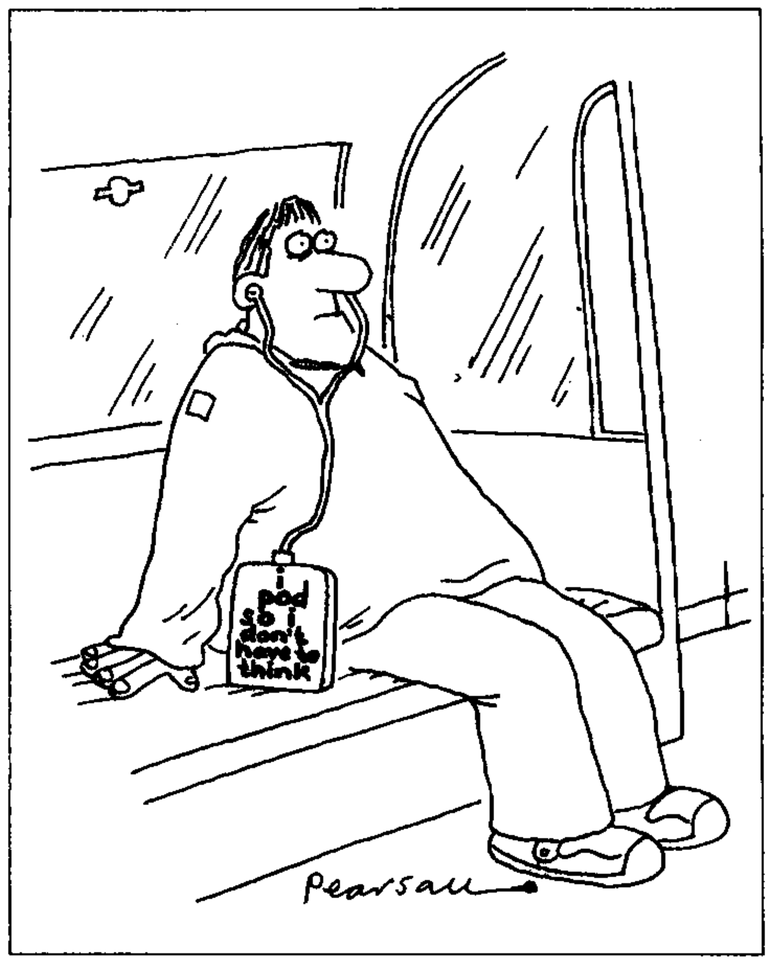
GETTING THE HUMP

FRESH embarrassment for Sunderland City Council, which has had to repay more than £34,000 in illegally issued parking fines.

Not only were insufficient local "traffic orders" issued for a new "decriminalised" parking regime which came into force in 2003 – therefore making thousands of parking tickets illegal – but it has now emerged that the same applies to speed humps and 20mph zones in scores of the city's streets.

By installing humps without proper legal orders, the council was, in fact, merely obstructing the highway. Motorists fined for speeding, or whose exhausts have been damaged, may now be able to sue.

Local campaigner Neil Herron, who exposed the cock-ups, believes that all parking tickets issued from 2003 until late last year could be unlawful – and due refunds – because they did not carry the date of issue. A report by the city solicitor reveals that parking contractor NCP was told to stop giving out tickets with no issue date



last June, but carried on regardless.

The parking shambles and scandals ensuing from the council's sale of its housing stock to the Sunderland Housing Group (*Eyes passim)* have made it likely that opponents of the city's clapped-out Labour regime will succeed in gathering the 10,000-plus signatures necessary to force a referendum later this year on whether to have an elected mayor. Various names are being bandied about as possible candidates, including Mr Herron and BBC Action Woman Kate Adie, who was brought up in Sunderland (Ms Adie tells the *Eye* this is the first she has heard of it).

Locals have been encouraged by the way entrenched Labour regimes were overturned in nearby Middlesbrough and Hartlepool in 2002 by "people's candidates" – former "Robocop" Ray Mallon and H'Angus the Monkey. Perhaps a monkey should stand in Sunderland, too – this being the council that prosecuted the late greengrocer Steve Thoburn for selling bananas by the pound.

● SO. FAREWELL then Tim Thorogood, "inspirational" chief executive of Swansea council, who has resigned in order to "develop his career in a different direction". Mr Thorogood walks away with a payoff of around £60,000 and conveniently says goodbye to an investigation into how he obtained planning permission for a "garage" at his home on the Gower peninsula that, to the untrained eye, looks uncannily like a large bungalow.

STRIFE OF BRIAN

PEMBROKESHIRE council leader John Davies, who last year won planning permission for a "herdsman's cottage" from his own council despite having sold all his cows (*Eye* 1135), has refused to sack a cabinet colleague who threatened to have a journalist's legs broken.

At a BBC reception Cllr Brian Hall, who had previously been asked impertinent questions about his Irish business connections by BBC Wales hack Simon Morris, told Tory Welsh Assembly member Glyn Davies and BBC marketing director Huw Roberts that he would have Morris's arms and legs broken, that he had contacts in Manchester who could do it, and that if Morris ever went to Ireland he'd never come back.

Unsurprisingly the local government ombudsman has now found that Hall was in breach of the councillors' code of conduct and has referred the issue to Pembrokeshire council's standards committee, which will deliberate.

Hall, meanwhile, claims it was all a joke – a tactic he has used before. Nine years ago he was summoned to a council meeting to be censured for threatening another councillor. He turned up armed with a whip, a pair of replica pistols and a pantomime axe and challenged the other councillor to come outside "if he was man enough".

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON KNIFE & PACKER

I RESENT THE DRACONIAN SMOKING LAWS IN OFFICE BUILDINGS! BEING FORCED TO STAND IN THE STREETS LIKE PETTY CRIMINALS...
QUICK, JEZ! I'M GASPING!
THERE YOU GO: JOJOBA AND QUINCE. I'M ON THE LAVENDER AND ROSE PETAL
AAH, THAT'S BETTER. JUST FEEL THE ESSENTIAL OILS STABILISING YOUR EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING!

NOOKS and CORNERS

MORE on the destructive Pathfinder scheme (or Housing Market Renewal Initiative) being promoted by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (*Eyes passim*) which involves spending £1.2bn by 2008 to demolish up to 400,000 pre-1919 terraced houses in the north of England.

According to the excellent report by Adam Wilkinson, just published by SAVE Britain's Heritage: "Whether by accident or design, Pathfinder is, in its current form, the largest single present threat to the historic environment. It currently blights areas rather than builds confidence. However, it need not do this… There is a clear need for proper scrutiny of how this massive investment of public funds is to be spent. Demolition is not the way forward."

Wilkinson's thoroughly researched document, *illustrated* with detailed case studies, conveys the enormity of what is going on. It is as if nothing at all has been learned from the mass clearances of the 1960s.

The report notes that the "so-called problem of market failure" was identified by the Centre for Urban Research at Birmingham University, which estimated that 1.5m homes were at risk of this (850,000 of which are in the designated Pathfinder areas) – a figure cheerfully accepted by the OPDM. But SAVE argues that the evidence justifying demolition is often out of date; and that a rise in house prices has transformed the housing market in many areas, "meaning that investment in repairs and improvements is a viable option and covered by a rise in value. Consequently, the policy is becoming more and more detached from reality… demolition as a means of improving market conditions is entirely unproven. Previous experience of housing clearance… suggests it can as easily aggravate blight."

At present Pathfinder is deemed viable because it exploits the mechanism of "Marriage Value" – the difference between the value of a run-down area of housing and the value of it as a cleared development site. What emerges is that in all Pathfinder areas there are disproportionately high levels of local authority or "Registered Social Landlord" ownership, and that if these owners encourage decline, the useful Marriage Value will increase.

SAVE argues that any differential ought to belong to homeowners and tenants, and that "It is clear that the financial motivation behind Pathfinder is considerable" and that the Marriage Value and the public funding on which it is based "is being taken from the very people whom Pathfinder purports to be trying to help… It's the poorest members of society who will be hit the hardest." But we will all be diminished by this destruction of our urban fabric.

It is also clear that the dinosaur thinking behind Pathfinder reflects an old Coronation Street era prejudice against 19th century terraces. It has long been recognised that such buildings can be brought up to modern standards easily and cheaply – although the fatuity of charging 17½% VAT on maintenance and repair but not on new build skews the picture. The urban terraced house, whether in Bath, Bloomsbury or the old industrial towns of the north, was England's major contributions to urban design.

In Pathfinder areas, houses are often condemned after a cursory 10-minute inspection, all of which "points to an excessive zeal for the demolition of pre-1919 buildings, curiously absent among those who live in them." And when local communities have fought these policies – as in Nelson, Lancashire – it soon emerges that they are based on flawed evidence.

Every MP ought to read the SAVE report on Pathfinder. They certainly read it at the ODPM because, within minutes of its publication, SAVE was accused of "scaremongering" and writing "nonsense". As an example of this "nonsense", the OPDM claims "SAVE is not interested in helping local communities" when in fact it is assisting them in clearance areas in Edge Lane and the Welsh streets in Liverpool, in Darwen, Nelson, Goole and the Gresham quarter of Middlesbrough. (Interestingly, here a local councillor and former council leader, Ken Walker, has been suspended by the local Labour Party for speaking up for the potential victims of Pathfinder demolitions.) SAVE has actually set up a £10,000 fund to help local groups fighting demolitions.

In another example the ODPM said, "the £168m spent on consultancies: this is not a figure we recognise" – although in February 2005 Lord Rooker, then Minister for Regeneration and Regional Development at OPDM, told parliament that £165m had already been spent on consultants.

The only "nonsense" is of course that spouted by the Deputy Prime Minister.

'Piloti'

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

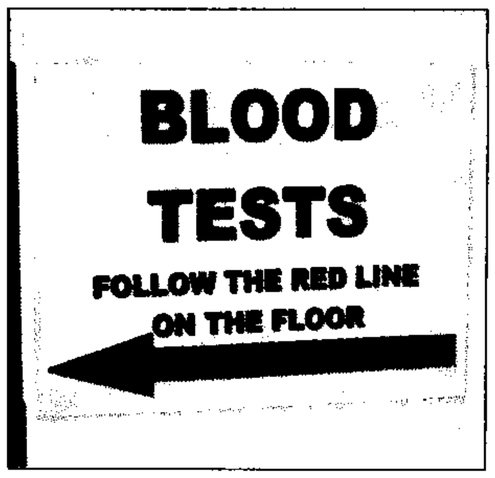
AFTER a year of outrageous manoeuvring and cunning, the European Commission has managed to have Fritz-Hermann Brüner (see *Eyes passim*) reappointed as head of Olaf, its so-called "independent" investigations service.

The fraud-busters at Olaf are not only supposed to fight external fraud in the European Union, but to carry out internal investigations too. Brüner has established a reputation for going easy on these internal cases. Hence the extraordinary lengths the commission has gone to, whittling down a list of 100 candidates to get Brüner back where it wants him.

The Brüner story starts when the German took charge of Olaf in March 2000 and began to acquire a reputation for being soft. By November 2003, Olaf was being officially criticized by the European ombudsman. By last summer the European Court of Auditors had also put the boot in. In a special report on the fraud-busters, it said: "All too frequently, the preparation and follow-up of investigations is rudimentary." Brüner's reign could have ended early last year, but to the amazement of some he was allowed to stay on until a replacement could be found. This makes his reappointment now all the more remarkable – especially since the first choice of the European Parliament was for someone different. The elected MEPs had Swedish Interpol veteran Bjorn Eriksson in first place. Meanwhile the EU ambassadors had chosen a Frenchman, Alain Gillette, whose record looked strong (a *legion d'honneur* for his service with the United Nations). A good number of EU officials are now privately sickened to see Brüner still at the helm.

Despite a reputation for being soft on internal cases, Brüner certainly got tough when Hans-Martin Tillack, an investigative journalist with the German magazine *Stern*, published information about Olaf's pisspoor performance. Did Brüner tighten up procedures? No. He got Belgian police to raid Tillack's flat and seize work files, containing his source contacts.

I-SPY *Glan Clwyd Hospital, Rhyl*



Submitted by Anon.

£10 paid for similar submissions.

(SAE required for return of photographs)

Down on the Farm

NOT everyone loves rape, that plant of the mustard family which colours vast tracts of our countryside a livid yellow in late spring. But it certainly has its uses.

When the flower turns to seed, it can be crushed so that every acre produces a ton of nourishing cattle food. Even more usefully, the 150 gallons of oil squeezed out of it can be used as high-grade fuel or "biodiesel" to drive vehicles or heating systems. In this age of fears over global warming, this has the huge extra advantage that it is "carbon neutral": unlike fossil fuels, it only puts back into the atmosphere the carbon dioxide it has needed to grow in the first place.

All this is eloquently explained by Dominic Goodwin, an international logistics consultant living in Kent. So passionate is he about the need to combat global warming that, as a sideline, he has set up a company, Biomotors, to provide the conversion kits necessary for cars and lorries to use this miraculous new fuel. As he points out on his website (and in an article in the current Smallholder magazine), farmers should love biodiesel because they can not only produce cheap fuel on their farms, with a simple crushing machine and filter, but they can also sell it on to the public.

The EU loves biodiesel and does all it can with directives to encourage its use. The Germans so love biodiesel that, with farmers co-operating to supply more than 100 filling stations, for at least three more years they are not putting any tax on it. Surely, one might have thought, with everyone so in favour of biodiesel, the British government must love it too? Not apparently so.

Until now the 27p a litre duty charged on fuel from vegetable oil, raising its price to 70p a litre, has been just small enough to allow it to compete with ordinary diesel, costing 75p a litre. Even this soon pays for the initial conversion cost for a car of £1,300. But now our new Revenue & Customs department has decided nearly to double the duty to 47p. By raising its price to 90p a litre, this makes biofuel from rape seed hopelessly uncompetitive.

What makes this even odder is that the duty on diesel made by large oil companies from plant and animal fats mixed with industrial chemicals remains at 27p. Why should the UK government go out of its way to flout the EU in discouraging what has been called "the greenest fuel of all"? Certainly the oil corporations are happy to see their small competitors disadvantaged in this way. Mr Goodwin also suggests that the taxmen find it easier to raise their money from a few large firms than from thousands of farmers producing only small quantities. Whatever the reason, this petty and vindictive decision yet again makes a mockery of the government's supposed green credentials. It also mocks the prediction by the great Rudolf Diesel himself as long ago as 1912 (quoted on Mr Goodwin's website) that the use of vegetable oils for engine fuels might in the future become "as important as petroleum". The very moment when we see fossil fuels beginning to run out might seem a perfect cue for our idiotically blind government to slam the door on Diesel's prediction.

'Muckspreader'

Letters

Satanic panic

Sir,

The letter written by Sarah Nelson in response to the article Satanic Panic (in Eye 1150), has puzzled me. She states: "The Satanic Abuse Witch-Hunt is the only witch-hunt in history where those supposedly leading it were its victims, and found their careers destroyed."

Judith Jones (Dawson), a social worker in the Nottingham Satanic case, is now listed as an expert witness and living and working in London. She was part of the review team who wrongly labelled Christopher Lillie and Dawn Reed as ritual abusers in the Shieldfield Nursery Nurses case.

Also on this review team was Jacqui Saradjian, who has written of satanic cults. She still works as an independent clinical psychologist.

If Ms Nelson believes that their current positions are indicative of a destroyed career, I suggest that she has set her aspirations a little too high. Perhaps she was not able to watch the recently screened BBC1 programme on the Rochdale case, which was handled so incompetently by professionals that 16 children have been left with mental health problems ranging from social anxiety to depression.

Regards,
PENNY CAMPBELL,

(Accused of animal sacrifice, devil worshipping, ritual sacrifice and drinking of animal blood during the Western Isles Satanic case of 2003/4.)

Down the Arkady

Sir,

In your interesting rewrite of the material on Arkady Gaydamek (In the City, 1150), you state that the arrest warrant against him was issued during a probe into violations of UN sanctions on arms trading.

Gaydamek's sins don't relate to violations of UN sanctions on arms trading, but to whether Gaydamek had broken French law, in trading arms, as well as tax evasion and possible corrupt payments to senior Angolan politicians. There is a great deal to be said about Gaydamek's activities, but not this. It was L'Affaire Elf, not the UN, and the international arrest warrant was issued by the French, with a possible previous Russian warrant. Sanctions were placed on the UNITA rebels, not the government. As one of the people involved in monitoring UN sanctions on UNITA until Angola's civil war ended in 2002, I have every reason to know.

CHRISTINE GORDON,
Via email.

Winter blues

Sir,

Re: "Donny déjà vu" (Rotten Boroughs, 1151). I was one of the "3,000 cheering, stamping supporters" at the Doncaster Rovers rally at which our esteemed and ego-free elected mayor was the guest of honour. Having been invited along to celebrate our second promotion in successive seasons and to hear some tub-thumping from our chairman John Ryan, many present were horrified to have the event politicised by the floor being given over to Winter.

I can assure you that the only cheering and stamping was in response to the parading of the Championship trophy and the appearance of the players – Mr Winter inspired only jeering and yelping. Just a shame there were not more voters there to be put off by his self-indulgent crap.

JIM McLEOD,
Via email.

War retort

Sir,

A friend has sent me a cutting from your recent issue concerning the Memorial to Women (Nooks & Corners, 1149). You have expressed the thoughts of many of us admirably, except for saying that no one dared to oppose the proposal.

I know of several ex-servicewomen who protested most vehemently to the powers-that-be; I did myself, more than once. We were all brushed off with the same circular letter telling us what a splendid piece of art it was.

Originally it was to be a memorial for servicewomen but when it proved impossible to raise the vast sum of money needed, it was decided to include all women of that time, whatever they did. We protested that the original plan, which included the air raid warden and the two children, looked like a Chinese peasant and her family, so we were delighted when that at least was abandoned. We are left with the coats which many say look like Nazi pictures of deserters or hostages being hanged.

A group of ex-ATS (Auxiliary Territorial Service – the women's army) dislike the Memorial so much they have started a separate fund to establish their own tribute in the form of an ATS girl. It will be erected in the National Arboretum in Lichfield as soon as possible.

Yours faithfully,
MRS G.K. STAPYLTON,
Tyne & Wear.

Small scream

Sir,

In Eye TV (1151) Remote Controller made some extremely good points about lengthy US TV series. However, the two-term limit for American presidents was only introduced in 1951, not by the founding fathers; syndication kicks in after around 91 episodes (allowing one repeat to be aired per day for three months) not "at least 100"; and Twin Peaks ran for two seasons, not one, although the first season only ran to a pilot and seven episodes. Apart from that, well done!

STEVE WILSON
London E6.

Arranging a death of a loved one isn't easy

But there are companies & services here to help you every step of the way

Advertisement, South Wales Echo

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"You just have to oil the batteries every now and then."
LEO SAYER, BBC
(Chris D. Duke)

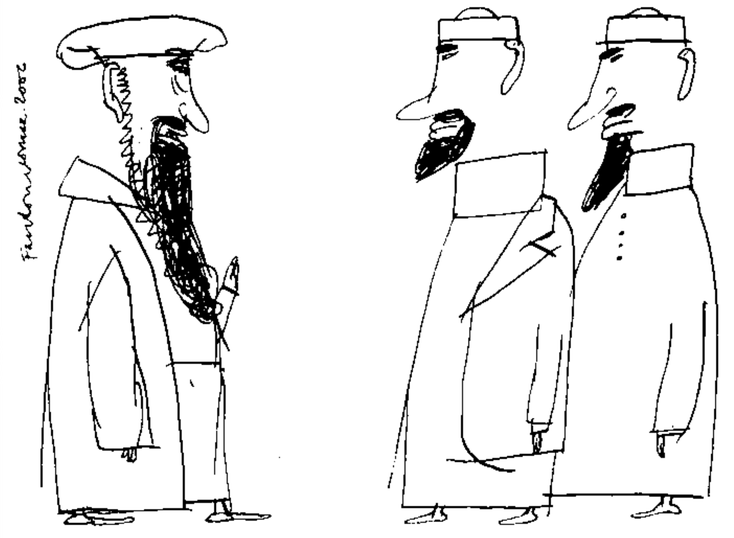
"He's a big king in a small pool."
ALAN GREEN, Radio 5 Live
(Malcolm Todd)

"It was still a shock when George died. It was the last thing I thought he'd do."
ANGIE BEST, Channel 4
(Laurence Inman)

"When it doesn't rain, it pours."
COLIN COOPER, Radio 5 Live
(Paul O'Hare)

"The woman with the face transplant was in the papers today. I thought she would keep a lower profile."
ROGER DAY, Saga Radio
(Alan Woodley)

Scenes You Seldom See



"We must remember, there are always two sides to every question"

Putting our Foot in it?

Sir,

Extensive though coverage of the misdemeanours of Mark Oaten was within the gutter tabloids, it fell to the Eye (1151) to inform me, quite against my wishes, of the detail of the unfortunate MP's penchant for "coprophilia".

Did the high standards of humanity, so often seen as being synonymous with your esteemed organ, accompany the sadly missed Paul Foot during his passing?

Yours faithfully,
ARCHIE BEATON,
Inverness.

Sir,

I'm afraid I had to look up the meaning of "coprophilia" in my school dictionary (the "Janet and John" edition from 1959). It wasn't there! I can only assume that it was a misprint and should have read "copraphilia", which is a love of coconuts.

From this, I presume we are talking about a novel use for Bounty Bars.

I think Mick Jagger and Marianne Faithfull should be informed.

Yours,
ALAN BOOTH,
Huddersfield.

Don't call us

Sir,

Your "Neasden Central Police Station" opening hours may have been tongue-in-cheek, but our local "nick" here in Wythall, North Worcestershire, although manned during the day, is locked to the public at all times. Also, the phone number is a closely guarded secret.

What do they do all day?

Yours,
MICHAEL LYONS,
Wythall, N. Worcs.

By the backdoor?

Sir,

Given the monopolistic behaviour exhibited by Microsoft thus far, one hesitates to second-guess any claims about their intentions. However, it's fair to say the computer security community doesn't generally believe that Microsoft deliberately inserted a "backdoor" into its Windows operating systems.

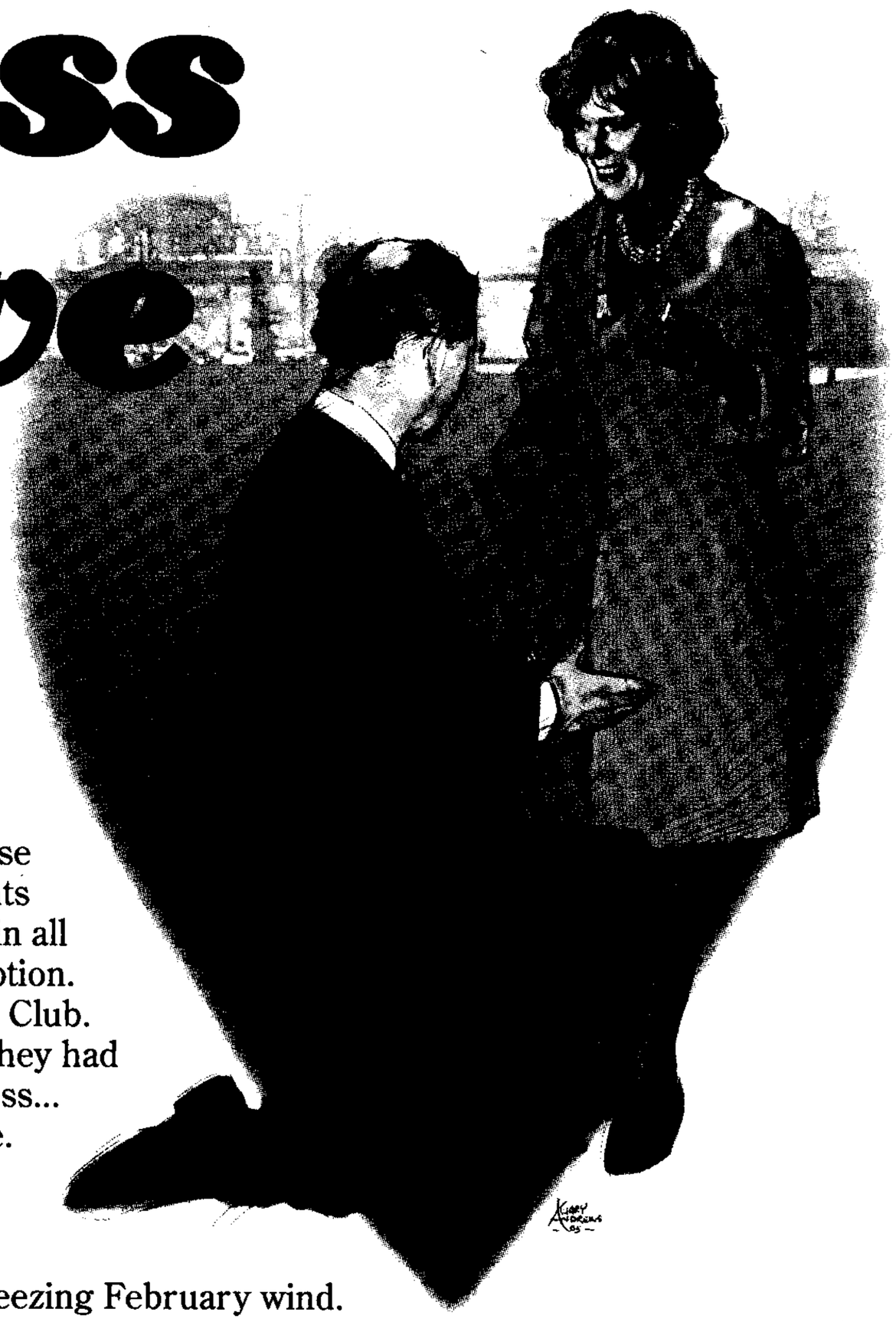
That assertion was originally made by Steve Gibson, who now accepts the vulnerability is a mistake, rather than intentional. He still claims it operates as a backdoor, but since that term is reserved for a deliberate exploit it becomes a matter of semantics.

BRIAN MILNER,
Via email.

The Romance of the Century!

Now at last – in one Valentine's Day Collection

Duchess of Love



by DAME SYLVIE KRIN

THE spring sunshine streamed through the window of the Neddy Seagoon room at Highgrove, bathing Camilla's hair with an ethereal glow.

Camilla puffed nervously on her full-strength Portsmouth Shag. What was Charles doing, grovelling on all fours at her feet? Had he lost his contact lens again?

"Er... er..." Charles stuttered. "I've got something to ask you, old girl."

Was this it? The moment she had been waiting for all those years? Her mind raced back to those blissful, stolen moments that had spelled out their furtive romance – their marriage in all but name. The moment their eyes met at her wedding reception. The quick kiss in the men's changing room at the Ikea Polo Club. The "first time" at the Ramada Hotel, Milton Keynes. How they had laughed when Charles tried to put his kilt in the trouser press...

And now, at last, here he was, her Prince on bended knee.

"Yes, Charles, yes... what was it?"

"Er... Could you help me up?" he whispered. "That damn arthritis has got the other knee now."

Outside, the ancient oaks of Highgrove groaned in the freezing February wind.

Now read on...

Chapter One

At last Charles and Camilla have named the day!

OUTSIDE, the famous organic gardens of Highgrove House were wreathed in a veil of virgin snow.

But inside the Purple Drawing Room, where a welcoming log fire crackled in the original Adam Nicolson inglenook, all was aglow with warmth.

Sprawled on a chaise-longue, Camilla happily inhaled on a Navy Half-Cut full tar untipped cigarette as she gazed longingly at the pages of the Brides R Us catalogue from Saga, with its tantalisingly beautiful variety of wedding ensembles, including The Mature Bride, Second Time Round and Never Too Late.

At last, her fondest dream was coming true!

Charles had finally "popped the question", down on one knee for what seemed an eternity, thanks to a sudden attack of his arthritis.

Camilla relived in her mind how she had playfully kept him in suspense, by saying immediately "Of course, Chazza, you idiot, I thought you'd never ask!"

"Ah, what memories," she pondered, exhaling a stream of joyous smoke which floated lazily towards the French window.

Her eyes followed the wreathing blue coils outside to where a crisp blanket of snow shrouded Charles's prized Pagoda of All The Faiths, with its minarets glittering in the pale winter sun.

But here and there, shyly peeping above the snow, were the purples, yellows and pinks of the first crocuses of spring – the harbingers of new life and happier times ahead.

There they were, just as Charles had described them that morning, "raising their little heads in a sort of, you know, hymn of praise and thanksgiving".

And there had been so much for her to be thankful for since the day the great news was announced to the world.

The bouquets of flowers. The dozens of cards from well-wishers. The hundreds of letters of support. The touchingly scrawled post-card from someone in Switzerland, showing a charming picture of the head-quarters of the Banque des Egyptiens, with the humorous message, "The Duke of Edinburgh will try and fuggin' kill you, signed A Friend".

But best of all, mused Camilla, was the fact that at last Her Majesty the Queen had given her royal approval to their match.

After all the years of Royal snubs and slights, at last she was going to be part of the family – Charles's wife no less!

Charles had told her as much himself. "Mater's finally come round," he had announced. "She's all for it.

"She said we couldn't go on with things as they were. The whole situation was messy. No one knew what to call you, or where to sit you at dinner, that sort of thing, which is *so* important."

So, there it was! A Royal Wedding! And where would it be? Obviously, it couldn't be St Paul's again. So it must be the Abbey! And perhaps a coach along the Mall. Her heart beat faster at the very thought. Crowds cheering. Bands playing. It was all going to be such fun...

continued over

"IT's all going to be such fun," said a curiously jittery Charles that evening, as they waited for Sir Alan Fitztightly to announce that dinner was served.

"There's going to be five of us, which is so much better than having hundreds of people one doesn't even know," he hurriedly went on.

"What are you talking about, Chazza? The Abbey holds thousands."

"Er, yes, old thing. It's not exactly going to be in the Abbey. The trouble is that, since I'm going to be head of the Church, it's all got rather complicated. D'you see what I'm getting at, old thing?"

"No, I don't!" Camilla responded sharply, fiddling impatiently with her turquoise-and-zircon engagement ring from Ratners of Belgravia and the Edgware Road.

"So, where's the venue then? Not that boring old chapel at Windsor with all those moth-eaten flags?"

"Oh, no, not there, obviously not," Charles stammered.

"Well, where?" she demanded. "I can't think of any other decent churches."

"Ah, you've hit the nail on the head there, old thing, and it's for that reason and that alone that mater and pater and, of course I, think that..."

Charles paused as he nervously took a bite from a Duchy of Cornwall badger-flavoured organic twiglet. "You know, it's nothing to be ashamed of, a registry office, the ceremony is much the same, it's just a bit quicker than hanging about in a church with all those hymns and, er, er..."

Charles finally ran out of steam and ground to a halt as the silence between him and his bride-to-be deepened and widened to fill the room like a dark and plangent thundercloud. Charles again tried to find words to reassure his consort, but he could not meet her eyes as they welled with tears of bitter disappointment.

"And it'll be so much more intimate with just the two of us and the boys – though probably not Harry actually, although he's promised to come on to the pub afterwards for the reception..."

As her dreams collapsed around her like a soap bubble bursting when it flies too high, Camilla clung to one final scintilla of hope.

At least her union with her beloved Charles would be graced by the presence of the Queen of England.

"But your mother will be there, surely?" she pleaded, her voice tinged with desperation.

"Er, there is a bit of a problem with this protocol thingie... and we've got to do it by the book and apparently they've discovered that the Queen can't go to a registry office if she doesn't want to... it's the Marriage Act of eighteen forty-something..." Charles put out his hand to calm her. "Anyway, it doesn't matter. The most important thing is that *you* will be there."

"I wouldn't count on it," Camilla snapped, throwing the bowl of organic twiglets in Charles's face as she turned on her heel and stormed from the room.

"Dinner is served," announced Sir Alan who had entered the room. "Will it be just the one tonight?"

Outside, the snow turned to sleet and an icy wind whipped the head off the crocuses, scattering the petals like so much unwanted confetti...

Chapter Two

With the wedding only weeks away, Charles is in Australia.

"AND, after the break, Prince Charles goes walkabout down under."

Camilla sat shivering in front of the small Major Ferguson 14in black and white TV set in a corner of the Purple Drawing Room.

Why was it that, when Charles was away, the heating had to be switched off, even when outside it was 10 degrees below zero?

He had once explained that it was the Royal contribution to "preventing those greenhouse gas thingies".

But, even so, it seemed a bit much that she had to light up another Capita Full Strength just to keep herself warm.

"And today the Prince had a real treat," chirped the newscaster, "as he was greeted in the tiny aboriginal settlement of Dongawanga by some local beauties in their traditional costume."

And there he was, her betrothed, standing in the bright antipodean sunshine, laughing and chatting with a group of nubile, bare-breasted young girls, as they playfully hung garlands of *rumpipumpi* flowers round his neck.

"No wonder the Prince looks so happy and relaxed, thousands of miles from all the troubles and worries back home."

"Thanks a bunch," Camilla snapped at the television, as she jammed her finger down on the 'off' button.

Troubles and worries were all she had been left with, she thought, as Charles cavorted carefree round the globe on his prolonged winter break.

And who was left to sort out the 101 things which needed to be dealt with in the run-up to a wedding? Even a low-key, cut-price, hole-in-corner affair like the one that her dear future mother-in-law had decreed was all that they could expect?

Camilla walked wearily over to the antique Chippenpin escritoire, piled high with all the invitations to the reception.

She read again with mounting anger the wording that had been decided on by the Royal secretarial staff, with the help of Lord Falconer, the Lord Chancellor:

"Charles and Camilla invite you to an informal celebration following their civil marriage at the Windsor Registry Office. Finger buffet only. Bring a bottle. Dress: Smart Casual. Sponsored by Tesco."

And who were all these people whom Charles had insisted should be on the list? The Chief Imam of Tunbridge Wells. The Secretary of the Organic Prayer Book Society. The Chair of the Welsh Women's League Against Windfarms.

How on earth were they going to fit in with such glittering figures as Sir Stephen Fry, Dame Joanna Lumley and Lord David Frost – let alone her own old horsey friends, such as Bunty Tulkinghorn or Roddy McCartney-Snape? The whole thing was too awful for words...

"IT WAS too awful for words!" Charles smiled at Camilla, looking more tanned and healthy than she'd seen him for years. "Very hot and jolly boring."

He was followed into the hallway by Sir Alan Fitztightly, staggering slightly under twelve suitcases.

"Be careful of that one," Charles hastily advised his equerry, pointing to a leather trunk. "It's got a live wombat inside."

"Well, you certainly looked as if you were enjoying yourself," Camilla countered coldly. "I saw the way you were flirting with those native girls."

"Oh, come on, old girl, one has to do that sort of thing in the line of duty. Dancing girls, receptions, you have to put on a bit of a show, smile at everyone, wave at the Abos – that's what the punters come for.

"And, anyway, when we're hitched you'll be coming with me on these jaunts. Well, probably, some of the time, now and again, once in a while, er..."

Sir Alan coughed politely. "And what would you like me to do with the wombat, sir?" he said, as he attempted to restrain the somewhat lively marsupial, as it climbed out of the trunk and began eating his velvet knee-breeches.

"Er, put him anywhere. Put him in the guest's bath, and we'll sort him out later," muttered the Prince, somewhat distracted by Camilla's obvious froideur.

Charles placed what he hoped was a soothing hand on her shoulder.

"Don't take on, old girl," he reassured her. "I've got a really wonderful surprise for you. It'll make up for all that disappointment business over the wedding."

"A present! What could it be?" Camilla's girlish excitement overcame her hostility.

A huge, priceless diamond from Digger's Rock? A flawless coral necklace from the Great Ticket Barrier Reef? An island of her own in the blue waters of the Greer Gulf?

"Give me a clue, Chazza," she pleaded, her voice trembling with expectation.

"Well, it's very small and you can lick it," he said, with a teasing smile.

"Don't be disgusting," she reprimanded.

"No, no, no, you silly sausage. It's our own stamp," he said, pulling out his wallet and extracting a small, square piece of paper for her approval.

"You see," he said, "it's us. You and me. Together. It's the highest honour the country can bestow. This is a real sign that we've been accepted."

Camilla, however, looked at him with a face of stone. "It's a bit crowded on this stamp," she said icily.

"What do you mean?" Charles wrinkled his brow in puzzlement.

"There are three people on this stamp. You, me and your bloody mother, up in the corner, staring at us."

"But she's always there," Charles protested.

"That's what I bloody well mean," Camilla exploded.

But before she could say any more, there was a cry of pain from the upstairs bathroom where the wombat had broken loose and fastened its teeth into the fleshy thigh of Sir Alan Fitztightly. It wasn't the only pain being endured in that small corner of Highgrove.

Chapter Three

The big day draws ever closer, but there is still much to be done.

ALTHOUGH the calendar said it was springtime, there was little sign of it at Highgrove.

Grey skies loured o'erhead, and a depressing drizzle obscured the outlines of Charles's new Gazebo of Gaia at the end of the yew-lined Van der Post Memorial Walk.

At a table in the Dimbleby Room, Camilla was leafing disconsolately through the pile of caterers' brochures which Charles had left with her, as he had gone off by helicopter to open the new organic bus-shelter in his beloved Poundbury Village.

'Kutprice Nosh' of Reading, 'Budget Tuck' of Slough, 'All You Can Eton' of Eton. The names stared out from the glossy leaflets as if deliberately mocking her dreams.

Was this all the Royal Family was prepared to pay for, to ensure that the greatest day of Charles's life was one which no one present would ever forget?

From what she had read so far, there was precious little she could offer the 75 distinguished guests for her allocated £6.50 a head.

So far, only Wongs of Windsor had come anywhere near a wedding breakfast on the somewhat limited budget ordained by her future mother-in-law.

Camilla lit a Ross Benson and Hedges Extra-Mild Full Strength, and began reading gloomily down the bill of fare suggested by the oriental purveyors of "nuptial fare for the nobility at a price you can afford", as the proprietor Mr Wong so delicately put it in his accompanying letter.

Starter: Dim Sum

Main: Egg-Fried Rice, Chips and Beans

Sweet: Black Forest Gateau.

She groaned inwardly. How different this was going to be from what she had fondly imagined down the years... The vast banqueting hall of Buckingham Palace filled with liveried flunkeys dispensing roast swan and finest Roman Abramovich caviar to the thousands of crowned heads from all over the world.

Kings, queens, earls, grand duchesses, all drinking her health, from flutes brimming with Vintage Veuve Twankée 1983 champagne.

How cruelly all those hopes had now been dashed...

"DASHED bad news, old thing."

A flustered Charles broke into Camilla's reverie, as he entered the Dimbleby Room, clutching the latest sheaf of replies to their wedding invitations.

Camilla steeled herself for what new humiliation might be heaped upon her, in addition to all those she had already had to endure.

Had the Queen decreed that she had to wear a wedding dress from the local Oxfam shop in Windsor High Street?

Would she have to leave for her honeymoon courtesy of Rashid's 24/7 Minicab Service (Heathrow only £40)?

And were her guests only allowed to throw 200 grams of biodegradable confetti-style 'Wedding Shower' under EU health and safety directives?

"Yes, Charles? What is it this time?"

She searched his face for some hint as to what might be the nature of the latest disaster to befall their supposedly 'perfect day'.

"Yes, er, well, it's about one of the family, who can't make it, after all, to our reception thingie."

Camilla's heart sank. At this rate there would soon be no one there at all.

"Who is it now?" she snapped, preparing herself for the worst.

"Actually, old girl, it's Pater. Apparently, he's discovered this long-standing commitment to... hang on, I'll read it to you."

Charles unfolded the letter, bearing the imposing crest of 'His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh' over his motto 'Semper Furiens'.

Dear Prince Charles,

Thank you for inviting me to your so-called wedding on whatever day it is.

Unfortunately, looking at my diary, I see that I've just arranged to spend a few days in Germany around that time, so I shan't be with you.

Signed in his absence,
BRIGADIER RODDY HUNTLEY-PALMER
(Private Secretary to Prince Philip).

But Camilla wasn't listening.

"Your father's not coming! That's tremendous news! It's the best thing that's happened for bloody yonks!"

"Is that really how you feel, Cammers?" replied a startled Charles.

"Yes, it bloody well is," she flared, all her frustrations and disappointment over the past few months pouring out in a sudden explosion of emotion.

"Oh, that's amazing," Charles countered, warmly, "because I feel exactly the same way."

Overcome with relief, he instinctively clasped her manfully in his arms, and smiles of unbridled joy suffused both of their beaming faces.

"Oh, Chazza!"

"Oh, thingie!"

"It's going to be a wonderful day after all!"

Their lingering embrace was interrupted by a nervous cough. Sir Alan Fitztightly stood by the open door. Charles turned to face him.

"Er, can't you see I'm sort of, you know, busy?"

The Royal Equerry's face flushed with embarrassment. "I do apologise, sire," he stammered, "but it's just been on the lunchtime news."

"What has, man?" Charles snapped.

"Apparently, it is official. Mrs Parker Bowles will be Queen..."

Hearing these words was like a dream come true. Camilla was enraptured. She repeated the message again, to herself, as if in a trance. "...will be Queen ... Queen ... Queen."

Yes! Now her cup of happiness was not merely full, it positively ranneth over.

Outside, the clouds parted and a ray of brilliant spring sunshine lit up the entire landscape in a dazzling tapestry of golden light.

And was that a distant peal of church bells in the distance?

Chapter Four

After months of turmoil and confusion, Camilla and Charles have finally tied the knot and are honeymooning in the ancient palace of Balmoral.

"HAPPY, darling?" Charles placed an arm tenderly around his new bride's shoulders as they gazed out together over the moonlit waters of Loch Loonie and the distant snow-capped peaks of Ben Elton.

"Bloody happy, Chazza!"

Camilla drew deeply on her first full-strength Senior Citizen untipped cigarette since breakfast, and watched a garland of smoke curling up towards the ceiling of the Prince Albert Room, with its massive teak four-poster bed in the shape of a battleship – a present to Queen Victoria from her cousin, the Grand-Duke Michael of Holsten-Carlsberg.

Camilla shivered slightly in the chill Highland air and pulled the lilac satin peignoir (a wedding gift purchased at the Henley-on-Thames branch of "Knickers R Us" by Sir John and Lady Mortimer) closer round her ivory shoulders.

Could it really be true, the moment she had dreamed of since she was a young woman snatching the fruits of forbidden love behind the strawberry tent at one of Lord Cowpat's legendary polo tournaments?

So often in the past few frantic weeks, it had seemed as if this moment would never come.

Everything had conspired against the wedding she had longed for.

The mix-up over the service in St George's Chapel, when it had been discovered by some beastly lawyer that it would be a criminal offence for them to get married there.

All the stupid speculation in the newspapers as to whether she would be called 'Queen' or just plain 'Duchess of Windsor'.

And then, of course, there was the untimely death of His Holiness the Pope, who had chosen just the wrong moment to pass away...

No wonder Charles had lost his temper on the ski-slopes when some impertinent little journalist from the BBC had asked him whether he was looking forward to his wedding.

But in the end, somehow, it had all worked out. It had, after all, been the wedding of her dreams.

The threatened snow had failed to materialise, and instead a brilliant April sun had shone on the cheering crowd lining the streets as they did their Saturday shopping. "Come on Hedgehunter!" the people had cheered as the Rolls-Royce Phantom X waited behind the Tesco lorry at the traffic lights leading to the register office.

And then there was the civil ceremony, the service, the reception – it all went by in a blur of happy snapshots.

The sweet, smiling archbishop with the silver beard joining them as one... the Queen kindly reminding her not to smoke in the Royal Chapel because they had already had one fire there... the young Princes up to their usual pranks pretending to be drunk and tying old boots to the train of her wedding dress... and all those people she had seen on the television. Was that really Mr Bean in a top hat...? And the gallant Sir Stephen Fry, telling everyone how "handsome" she was... ? And even Charles's friend Tara Rara-Boomdeay had put on some clothes for a change... Yes! What a day! It would be forever embedded in the photograph album of her mind.

And now here, secluded from the world in this romantic fairy-tale castle, they could at last be man and wife in the full sense of the word...

THERE was a discreet knock at the door. It was Auld Angus McVittie, the ancient retainer. He was carrying a huge silver dish, bearing twelve dozen oysters.

"Your late great-grandfather Edward VII always swore by them when he entertained his married ladies up from London," he announced as he placed them on a table by the bed.

Charles blushed. "That will be all, McVittie," he hastily admonished the departing retainer.

As the door closed, there was a strange wailing sound from the terrace beneath the window.

The newly-weds peered down through the darkness to where, far below, a lone piper from one of Charles's beloved regiments, the 49th Highland Buffoons, was warming up to play a selection of hits from *South Pacific*.

"Listen, darling!" Charles exclaimed. "He's playing our tune!"

And so he was. The plangent strains of *Some Enchanted Evening* floated up through the night, just as they had done for every royal honeymoon couple since time immemorial.

As this romantic serenade died away on the night air, Charles moved expectantly towards the bed, where Auld Angus had laid out the tartan pyjamas he always wore when north of the border.

Camilla stubbed out her cigarette and turned down the lights. They were alone at last, just the two of them in the silence.

"Oh, Chazza!" she whispered.

"Oh, Cammers!" he breathed.

"Oh, excuse me, Your Royal Highness." A familiar voice broke in on their intimacy, as the red-headed figure of Nicholas Witchell emerged from underneath the bed.

"How are you enjoying your honeymoon, sir?" asked the BBC's royal correspondent in his silkiest tones.

So this was what her new life was to be like, thought Camilla, her heart sinking like a stone.

Outside, the stars in the velvet heaven seemed to go out one by one, as the dark snowclouds gathered down the vasty sides of Glen Morangie.

Chapter Five

After the excitements of that unforgettable wedding day, married life is proving blissful for the royal couple.

"ARE you ready, darling? We don't want to be late for church." Charles adjusted the sporran on his Clan McGonagall kilt for the third time, as he waited for Camilla to finish her post-breakfast Crofter's Full Strength cigarette on the Balmoral terrace.

What a wonderful spring morning it was – just right for them to sally forth to church together for the first time as man and wife.

Charles gazed across the heather-strewn sward of Glen Fiddich to where the tower of the little Celtic church of St Brillo peeped between the dark conifers.

As the sound of a single bell summoned them to worship, Charles's thoughts went back to unhappier times when he trod this same path with his first wife.

How different it was then. The vast crowds of press-men and photographers jostling to get a photograph of her.

"Over here, love." "Give us a smile, Princess." "Just one more, Di!"

And how she had relished performing for them, as he trailed disconsolately in her wake, his hands clasped behind his back to express his frustration...

"OK, Chazza, let's do it!" But there she was, his blushing new bride, in the familiar red outfit that she liked so much.

And wasn't that the Taj Mahal diamond she was wearing at her throat, its iridescent surface sparkling in the Highland sunshine like a shoal of tropical fish flashing through the translucent waters of the Great Barrymckenzie Reef? *(Get on with it. Ed.)*.

"Do you know, Cammers...," Charles began, waving a finger at the gleaming jewel, "...that brooch was a gift to my grandmother, the Queen Mother, from the Biryani of Madras at the time of the Coronation in 1937, as a sort of symbolic..."

"Very interesting, Chaz, but you can tell me all about it later. We really must get a move on. Isn't that the vicar waving to us?"

"No, no, it's not the vicar. Up here we call them ministers. This one's called the Reverend Ronald McDonald..."

"THE Reverend Ronald McDonald at your service, ma'am. May I welcome you to our humble kirk, and may I be so bold as to say how radiant you look this morning in that beautiful red outfit?"

Charles's heart swelled with pleasure. How warmly she was being accepted by everyone!

And seeing the crowds of local people who had gathered outside the church to welcome him and his new bride – some of them from as far away as Tokyo – his fears melted away like the winter snows from the distant summit of Ben Pimlott.

As the traditional service began, with a rousing rendition of that well-loved old Scottish hymn, Mull of Kintyre, Charles felt that at last he was coming to what his old friend and mentor Sir Laurens van der Postalfraud used to call "the plateau of contentment".

How well he remembered that long-ago night round the camp fire in the Kalagassi Desert, when the white-haired sage had been roasting a snake on a spit according to an old Bushman recipe for "snake and chips". His reverie was broken by the

solemn tones of the craggy-faced Scottish minister.

"My brethren," began Rev. McDonald, looking down on them from the simple pinewood pulpit, "My theme for today is that plateau of contentment which we all seek as we journey through life."

"Aye, aye, so we do the noo," chorused the loyal flock of ghillies and fisherfolk from the estate, as Camilla stole a glance at her Cartier Ruck watch. "How long is this going to go on?" she whispered to Charles...

"HOW long is this going to go on?" Charles called out jokingly to the massed ranks of photographers, as the couple stood on the church path when the service had finally come to a close, with the organist playing an impromptu version of *'Lady in Red'* for his voluntary, in honour of the new parishioner.

Charles's traditional impatience with the attentions of the fourth estate had quite disappeared now that he knew that this time the focus would be on him as the heir to the throne. Camilla would be there, but in the background, as his support and "help-meet thingie", as the silvery-haired archbishop had put it so movingly at their service of blessing after the visit to the Windsor Register Office.

"Sorry, old girl, but you know I do have to do this sort of thing. Duty calls and all that."

Charles laughed as he strode purposefully down the path to greet a small child who was holding out a jam roll made by her grandmother Mrs McTavish.

"I suppose you want a shot of me sort of eating this jam thingie, do you?" Charles smilingly volunteered to the hundreds of waiting photographers.

But scarcely had he spoken than he was swept aside, as the horde of paparazzi rushed past him to where his wife was standing alone by the church gate.

"Over here, love." "Give us a smile, Duchess." "Just one more, Camilla."

Charles gazed forlornly at the scene, as the little girl snatched the jam roll from his hand and ran off towards the newly-ennobled Duchess of Rothmans...

Chapter Six

Charles and Camilla have now been blissfully married for a whole month. But is all as well as it seems?

"THIS organic coffee of yours is not so bad after all!" Camilla drained the exquisite bone china Wedgwood Benn cup of its last delicious drop and reached for her usual post-breakfast Chirac Untipped Extra Strength.

As she drew the tarry Gallic vapours deep into her generous embonpoint, Charles coughed, trying in vain to fight back his irritation at his new bride's morning ritual.

"If you have to do this smoking thingie," he said, as he surveyed with distaste the packet showing a prancing man in a beret proudly brandishing a copy of the new EU Constitution, "couldn't you at least choose a British brand?"

"You mean, like you driving your BMW?" she riposted with a teasing smile.

"Anyway, I'm off to brew up some more coffee," she went on.

As she rose, Charles placed a restraining hand on the silken sleeve of her Jose Mourinho peignoir.

"Hang on, Cammers, old thing. There's no need for you to do that. Just ring the bell and a little man will come along and do it for you."

"But I like doing it," his bride persisted.

"It's the sort of thing a wife likes to do for her husband."

"Yes, I sort of see what you mean," Charles stuttered. "But it's not what we do here. I mean, the staff wouldn't like it, if you come barging into their kitchen thingie and start to turn on the gas in the fridge and all that sort of thing."

Camilla looked amazed. "You mean, I can't even go into my own kitchen any more?"

Charles shifted uncomfortably, retying the belt of his Old Gordonstounian dressing gown, a personal present from the old headmaster, Dr Himmler, with its proud badge showing a member of staff hitting a boy with a wet towel, over the school motto *'Semper Miserabilis'*.

"You see, what you've got to realise, Cammers, is that things are different now. You're one of the family now, one of the firm. I mean, there's a whole lot of things we just don't do."

"Like what?" Camilla stared at him accusingly. "What exactly is it that I'm not allowed to do anymore? I suppose you're going to tell me that I can't even pop over to Tetbury to get a packet of fags from Mr Ali?"

"Good heavens, no. The way it's done is that you ring down to Sir Alan, and he'll tell the footman on duty, and he'll tell the under-footman, and he'll make the arrangements, and then sometime tomorrow afternoon you'll get your cigarettes, and anything else you want. D'you see? It has to be like that. It's a protocol thingie."

Camilla's head reeled at the thought of how changed her life was going to be.

"You see," her husband went on, "you're now one of us..."

"HERE's one of us." Camilla read the scrawled note which accompanied a photograph of four women on horseback, riding under a cloudless, azure sky through the olive groves of the Tuscany campagna.

How sweet of her old friend Penny Rumpole to send this treasured memento of the unforgettable girls-only holiday they had enjoyed together the previous summer.

Camilla took the delightful snapshot over to the window to look at it more closely in the light.

Penny, on her fiery chestnut stallion, Berlusconi. Laetitia Starborgling-Cohen, on the little piebald, Caravaggio. And dear Clarissa Plunkett-Green, coming up fast behind on her fat but frisky grey, Pavarotti.

What fun they'd all had on those glorious sunlit days, as they galloped up the valley to the picturesque little hilltop town of Montepythone. There, in its ancient church, they had all been enthralled by the famous quattrocento frescoes by Piero di Moroni, showing the temptations of San Andrea di Brillo at the hands of a dusky maiden sent by the devil to torment the saint in his cell.

And in the evening, what larks they had enjoyed, sitting in the little piazza under gaily-coloured parasols, swigging back bottle after bottle of the heady local Valpollitoynbi wine and gossiping good-naturedly about their friends back in England.

"Poor old Priscilla, Rodney's left her again for that gay personal trainer he met at the Vanderbilt... Oliver, haven't you heard, he's back in the Priory... Philippa's Jamie's been sacked from Eton for running a cocaine ring... that's a bit tough, just before his 'A' Levels..."

And, to top it all, who should have swept them all up and invited them to stay in his nearby palazzo but the dashing Count Lazio di Lavazza himself.

Camilla would never forget that night, as they all swam in his marble pool under the silvery light of a Tuscan moon...

"What have you got there, Cammers?"

Charles was looking over her shoulder at the photo.

"Who are all those funny-looking women?" he asked.

"It's our girls' holiday last year in Italy," she explained. "It was such a laugh that we're going again this June."

"Not this year, darling. Haven't you looked in the diary? In June we're opening a new library in the Gilbert and Sullivan Islands, and after that we've got to light the flame at the Pacific Games in Samosa, and then to the anti-windfarm conference in Balti, and then..."

"You mean, there's no holiday this year?" Camilla asked, her heart sinking.

"No, no, far from it, we've got two months at Balmoral with mater and pater. It'll be such fun, you know, grouse-shooting, salmon-fishing every day, the Highland Games at Rorybremner – it beats going to Italy any day."

Charles moved over to his favourite armchair by the fire to read the freshly-ironed copy of the Daily Telegraph that had just been brought in by Sir Alan Fitztightly.

Its headline proclaimed *'Princess Di Fountain Closed Due To Wrong Kind Of Mud'*.

As Camilla read it from across the room, she was overcome by a terrible sense of doom. The leaded drawing room windows began to look ominously like prison bars...

Chapter Seven

Prince Charles has whisked off his new bride to a luxury post-nuptial cruise in the Aegean.

"HOW blue the sky is," purred Camilla, "and how warm the sun," she added, as she reclined on a lounger on the polished wooden deck of the 600-foot ocean-going yacht *King Midas*, the flagship of the fleet owned by the Greek billionaire philanthropist Stavros Taxlos.

"Doesn't Highgrove seem like another world?" she went on, as her gaze lingered on the gambolling dolphins, as they sported alongside the sleek, white hull of the world's largest and most opulent yacht, as it sliced its way through the azure main.

Camilla couldn't remember ever being so happy in all her life. This surely was the honeymoon she had dreamed of for so long. Just her and the man she loved, cocooned on this floating island of love – and all alone, apart from the 400 members of Mr Taxlos's attentive crew, supervised by their charismatic and bearded captain, Doner Kebab.

"Would Your Highness care for an aperitif?" purred an olive-skinned steward at her elbow. "Could I recommend a glass of the local *taki*? It is delicious."

"Yes, thanks, that sounds terrific. And could I have another pack of these Euripides untipped?"

She lit a cigarette and gazed happily across at her beloved husband, as he sat doggedly at his easel, attempting a water-colour of the idyllic scene unfolding below them.

"Very difficult to do, these dolphins," he called out. "They keep moving. As soon as you think you've got one, it goes back in the water."

Camilla pulled her House of Hurley floral sarong round her waist, as she strolled over to inspect the incipient masterpiece.

"I think it's really good, Chazza. You've really got those clouds awfully well," she said encouragingly.

"Well, no, those are the waves actually," he replied, a faint note of impatience creeping into his voice.

"As long as you're happy, Chazza. That's what matters. And, just think, we've got two whole weeks together. No telephone calls from your mother. No boring speeches to make. None of those ghastly photographers following us around everywhere. Just the two of us..."

THE evening sun was sinking into the sea like a giant, orange ball, as the *King Midas* glided gracefully into the picturesque little fishing harbour beneath the towering shadow of Mount Bathos.

From the waterfront, Camilla could hear the enticing strains of a sudoku player strumming some lively folk tunes, while the smells of the traditional local dish, *mouskori*, rose from glowing charcoal braziers.

On the quayside, a gnarled old fisherman was playing a traditional, local game of backgammon on his mobile phone.

Camilla leaned over the rail, drinking it all in. And there was the little tender coming alongside, ready to take them ashore to savour all these wonderful sights and sounds in what promised to be a perfect end to a perfect day.

But what was this?

Charles was standing at the head of the gangway, dressed in a sombre grey suit, carrying his overnight bag.

"What are you doing, Chazza? I thought we were going ashore?"

"Well, not exactly. Didn't I mention it? Only, I've arranged to go on a kind of retreat thingie in the monastery here. I'll only be gone for a week or so.

"And they'll look after you awfully well on the ship..."

Camilla reeled, as though struck by a lightning bolt hurled down from Olympus itself.

"What the hell do you think you're doing, Charles? I thought this was meant to be our honeymoon."

Charles stammered a reply. "It is. But, you know, a chap's got to have some space to himself, to sort of think things through."

Camilla was speechless, anger and hurt welling up in her sun-kissed embonpoint, as Charles stumbled on in a feeble attempt to justify himself.

"It's all in that wonderful book *Me And My Shadow Self* by my old friend Sir Laurens – *'The more you are apart, the more you are together'*. How very true that is, don't you think, when you sort of think about it?"

And with that he was gone, down into the darkness, leaving her with only the silvery orb of the rising moon for company.

Didn't those old Greeks believe that Diana was the goddess of the moon?

And was that the faint echo of a woman's laughter that she could hear from the Elysian fields?

Even on that warm Mediterranean night she felt a Stygian chill clutching at her heart.

Chapter Eight

Charles and his new bride have been invited on to HMS Intolerable to witness the historic Review of the Fleet in commemoration of the Battle of Trafalgar.

"IT'S so exciting..." said Charles, pointing out into the mist. "Over there, that's the Nigerian destroyer the *General Machete*... you can just make her out."

Camilla grabbed at her hat as the wind in the Solent built to a Force 9 gale.

"And over there – although you can't actually see her – is the Japanese aircraft carrier the *Emperor Hirohito*... Incredibly impressive."

Camilla stared hard at the grey choppy waters of the Channel and began to feel a tiny bit queasy. If only she could have had a calming cigarette – perhaps a Senior Service would have been appropriate under the circumstances – but fate had decreed that this was the very day that she had decided to eschew the habit of a lifetime.

"Look through the bins, old girl, those things round your neck."

Charles gestured at her standard-issue Naval binoculars, but Camilla turned to her husband instead and gazed adoringly at him. How impressive he looked today in his uniform of Lord High Admiral of the Fleet, and how masterful, with his medals gleaming on his manly chest. The Imperial Order of the Holy Knights of Zimbabwe; the Grand Cross of the Supreme Kingdom of Majorca; the Royal Star of the Ancient Bailiwick of Sark; the Golden Oak Leaves of the Most Noble League against Windfarms – Camilla had seen Charles receive this one in person from the veteran campaigner Dr Barkworth at a special ceremony in the Multi-Faith Pagoda in the garden at Highgrove...

"It's so marvellous to see history coming alive... you know, it's just not taught in school any more; all they do now is play with their awful Gameboys... but Nelson was a real hero you know."

For a minute the wind dropped, a pale ray of sun illuminated the poop-deck, and Charles strode towards the prow with Camilla in his wake.

And as he stood with his arm thrust into the jacket of his uniform, Camilla listened spellbound as he seemed to undergo some strange transformation before her very eyes.

"Er... England expects every person to do his or her duty... I see no ships... Kiss me Thingie."

Camilla felt lightheaded. Was it nicotine withdrawal symptoms? The man at the Cirencester Boots had warned her that giving up suddenly could have strange side-effects. She might even, he had warned her as he handed over the organic herbal "Fag-Off!" patches, suffer mild hallucinations...

"MY dear Lady Hamilton. How gorgeous you look today. And how good of you to come aboard my flagship, the *Victory*, on this day of all days."

"Why, Admiral!" she found herself saying. "How gallant you are. And you make the British nation proud."

He took her hand and kissed it warmly. Their eyes met and there could be no doubting the flame of passion burning beneath the rows of glittering medals.

"Why don't we inspect my cabin?" he said smilingly, with a twinkle in his one remaining eye.

"But your wife, sire..." she stuttered.

"Let us not speak of *her* today. That sad and pitiable creature. No! Let us pluck the hour because we know not what fate will bring by sundown. As my old friend and mentor, the Doctor from the Low Countries Sir Laurens van der Post, once put it so well, 'Eat, drink and be merry'. How true that is... how very true when you think about it... Er... are you all right?"

"ER... Are you all right, Cammers old girl? You've gone a sort of green colour."

Camilla opened her eyes to find Charles fanning her face with his white cap as she lay on the well-scrubbed deck of the British frigate.

"I was just saluting Mater and Pater on the HMS *Insolvent* over there when I turned round and you were sort of lying on the floor."

A team of naval officers immediately rushed to the scene and helped Camilla to her feet.

"Would you like to come in out of the rain?" asked one eager young flag lieutenant.

"Thank you," she replied weakly. "I don't know what came over me."

"Well it's a big day Ma'am. The excitement gets to all of us," he reassured her and Camilla soon found herself ensconced in the warmth and comfort of HMS *Intolerable*'s panelled wardroom.

"Would you like a paper to read, Ma'am?" he offered. "I'm afraid we've only got the *Sun*. It might cheer you up a bit though."

Camilla accepted with a nod of her head and tried to relax. Anything to take her mind of her seasickness. But there, staring out from the front page, was the less than cheering sight of Princess Diana, her nemesis, underneath the headline "'Charles was useless in bed' says sexy Di".

Camilla tossed the paper wearily to one side.

"Cigarette, Ma'am?" offered her young protector.

"Do you know, I think I bloody well will."

Chapter Nine

Camilla and Charles have been married for a hundred glorious days.

"WHAT a perfect English day," thought Camilla, as the rain flooded down on the picturesque little Norfolk village of Bernard St Matthew.

She and Charles were attending the village fete to raise money for one of Charles's many charities, Prayerbook Lovers Against Windfarms.

They had all said it would never happen – but how wrong they were!

Here she was, on Charles's arm, as he graciously tried to guess the weight of the prize locally-bred turkey on the table in front of them.

"Er, gosh, it's rather a big one, isn't it? Can I do it in pounds and ounces, or have I got to do it in those kilometre thingies?"

"Ha, ha, ha, Your Majesty!" the villagers all laughed as he prodded the enormous fowl with his decorated walking stick, a gift from the Islamic Centre in Hackney.

Camilla bathed in the goodwill and affection that was being showered on them wherever they went.

"Three cheers for Charles and Camilla!" shouted one loyal old countryman, as he puffed his ancient clay pipe.

"I like *your* bird, sir!" ventured a cheeky youngster, dressed in traditional shellsuit and trainers.

Camilla blushed as she led the happy laughter. And she was even getting used to having her picture taken by those friendly photographers who followed them wherever they went.

Even as the thought crossed her mind, a group of them emerged from behind the bouncy castle.

"Camilla!" they chorused. "Give us a smile, darlin'. Show us yer wellies, luv!"

There was a time when Charles would have been irritated by such an intrusion, and by the media's obvious preference for pictures of his spouse rather than himself. Not, of course, out of any sense of vanity, Charles would have insisted to himself, but because he was, after all, you know, heir to the thingie, and therefore should be the centre of attention.

But how different it was now with Camilla, he thought, on this hundredth day of their new "reign of love".

And, talking of rain, the steady downpour began to slacken and a ray of watery sunshine illumined the pastoral scene.

As Camilla stepped forward to try her skill at the "Whack The Rat" stall, one of the photographers leaned forward to confide in her.

"You needn't worry, Camilla. You've totally replaced her, you know. For us and for the whole country. We don't even think about her any more, because you've just taken over her role completely."

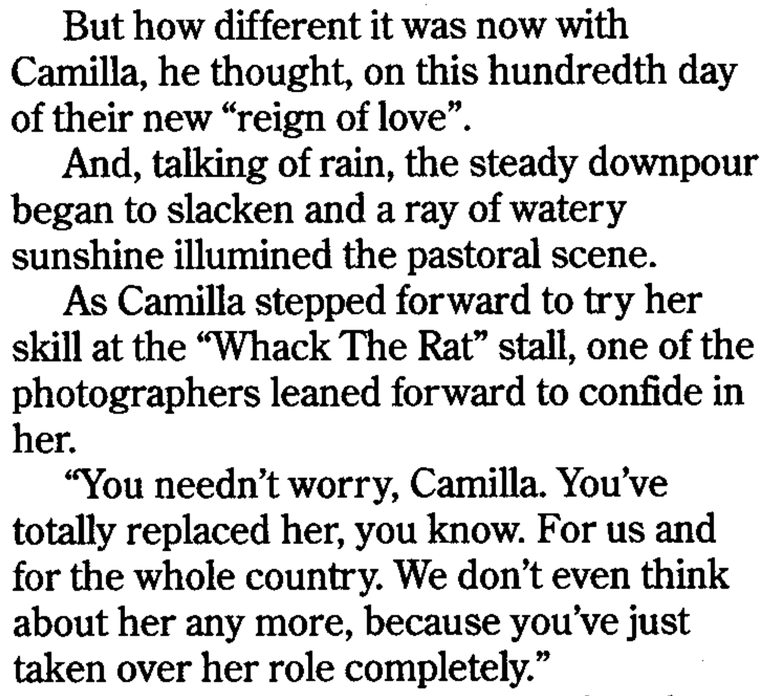
Camilla's heart began to pound as she grasped the mallet with which she would be expected to strike the hand-knitted rodent as it descended from its plastic drainpipe.

Was this the moment she had waited for all these years?

Was this the final triumph over her glamorous rival which she had feared would never come?

"Who needs the Queen Mum now we've got you?" laughed the photographer as he fired off another flash in her face.

The rat fell unimpeded into the mud, and the Norfolk rain began to descend in earnest.



Chapter Ten

Charles and Camilla have been invited on an important Royal tour to the USA, as guests of the most powerful man in the world.

"DON'T worry, old thing, it's all going to be fine!" Charles placed a reassuring hand on Camilla's trembling shoulder, as their armour-plated stretch limousine purred along Watergate Avenue towards the world-famous White House. "They love us here. Just you wait and see!"

Camilla felt happier, and turned to wave through the window at a large, black lady on the 'sidewalk' , who waved a placard reading 'Bush Murderer'.

Charles was now in full flow, as he explained to his bride the finer points of the American constitution.

"You see, Mater is actually head of state, which is why, as her representative, I have to meet President Bush, who is also head of thingie. So we're really on equal terms."

"Yeah, quite right, Chazza," said Camilla distractedly. "Is what I'm wearing okay? I mean, does this hat go with the shoes?"

Charles, who was by now gazing admiringly at the resplendent pillars of the new Clinton Memorial, at the junction of Lewinsky and 69th, replied automatically, "You always look wonderful in red, darling".

"Actually, it's blue, Chazza."

"Is it? These tinted windows make it rather difficult to see. Still, it's wonderful weather, isn't it...?"

"IT'S wonderful weather, isn't it?" welcomed the President, in his homely Texan drawl, his wife Laura at his side.

Turning to Camilla, he said, "And it's a very special honour to have you here, Princess, whom our entire nation has taken to their hearts."

Camilla flushed with pride at the unexpected warmth of his greeting, and laughed nervously.

As the party strolled over the beautifully manicured White House lawn, lined with stately Condoleezza trees, clad in their most glorious autumnal hues, reds, golds, yellows, reds, golds *(Get on with it, Ed.)*, the band of the Guantanamo Bay Irregulars struck up with the theme tune of *'The King And I'*.

"It's the national anthem of England-land, Your Majesty," explained the President, "in honour of your good self and

your lady princess." Charles smiled diplomatically, "Yes, well, er, sort of".

Everybody laughed at the President's quaint way of putting things, and Camilla relaxed. It was going much better than she had dreamed. How well they were getting on.

Now Mrs Bush took Camilla by the arm and led her confidingly towards a little group of waiting photographers.

"We're going to have our picture taken. But you don't need me to tell you all about that, ma'am." The First Lady winked knowingly. "Why, you must have been on more magazine covers than anybody in the whole wide world!"

Had she? Camilla thought back. Well, yes, it was true that she had been on the front of *Horse and Hound* in 1985, with her friend Jemima Ricketson-Hatt. And more recently she had graced the cover of the August edition of the Tetbury Parish News, giving away the prizes at the Highgrove Organic Flower Show.

As the photographers concluded their business, the President genially invited Charles and Camilla to "step inside where we have some light refreshments after your long journey from Buckingham Castle".

The hero of Baghdad led them into the famed Betty Ford Cocktail Parlour, where, waiting to greet them, were a galaxy of fashionable celebrities.

Camilla recognised most of them at once. Wasn't that Mr and Mrs Sting? And Yoko Ono, beautifully turned out in a silk kamikazi boiler suit? And the distinguished-looking bald man? Wasn't he in Frasier? Or was it Friends? What was his name? How irritating, she would have to ask her new friend George, whom she could see talking animatedly to his wife by the window.

As she came closer, she could quite clearly hear them talking.

"Lawdie, Laura, she's sure aged badly, this lady. The most beautiful woman in the world?"

"And what about her dress sense? My-oh-my, have you seen that red thing she's wearing?"

"It would look better on a horse!"

Camilla turned away, tears starting to her eyes. She could not believe what she was hearing. Yet it was true, all too true.

Where was Charles? She needed him now. He was across the room, talking earnestly to a group including the Vice-President, Mr Cheney, Mr Rumsfeld, the much-admired Secretary of State for Defence and Mr Rove, known throughout the land as 'The President's Brain'.

She stumbled towards them, Mr Bush's words still ringing in her ears, "Better on a horse..."

As Camilla arrived at her husband's side, he was in full flight. "You see, the thing about this global warming thingie, is that you chaps have got to start pulling your weight. I mean, all these ridiculous great cars you all drive around in..."

Camilla's heart sank. Charles was obviously in no mood to listen. She stepped through the French window onto the terrace, where autumn leaves were beginning to fall.

Was that the mocking laughter she could hear again from beyond the grave...

Chapter Eleven

Charles and Camilla have been to the Christmas service at Sandringham for the first time as a married couple.

THE NORFOLK landscape had never looked lovelier, clothed in a veil of white. The Royal Ensign fluttered proudly from the tower of the little, ancient church of St Stephen Le Fry, announcing that the Queen and her family had just celebrated Communion together.

And no one had enjoyed the simple service more than Camilla, Duchess of Marlboro-Lites and now wife of the heir to the throne.

As she and Charles walked together down the church path, lined with early snowdrops, happy thoughts teemed through Camilla's mind like a joyous swarm of honey bees going merrily about their business.

At last she felt truly one of the family! At last she sensed that they had accepted her on her own terms.

The crowd of loyal onlookers surged forward to greet her, holding out bouquets of purple Narnia lilies and slices of home-made Christmas cake, bearing the multi-faith messages that were now so much part of Charles's traditional Christmas: 'Merry Diwali and a Halal New Year!'.

"Did you notice, darling?" Charles murmured, as they walked towards the waiting royal limousine. "They mentioned you in the prayers. Mater absolutely insisted."

And she had. How could she ever forget the moment when she heard the vicar, Canon Bernard Matthews, pronouncing the words "And we now pray for Charles, Prince of Wales, and whoever he is married to at the moment."

A thrill had gone through her like a bolt of electricity. Yes, that was her the priest was referring to! It was all going so well. This was turning out to be a Christmas she would never forget.

The car purred regally away towards the ancient walls of Sandringham Castle, where the royal family would soon be sitting down to a luncheon of organic turkey and GM-free brussels sprouts specially flown in the previous day from Highgrove by a helicopter of the Queen's Own Flight.

Charles turned towards his bride to murmur, "Look here, old thing, you know I've decided that when I become, er, you know, king-thingie, I'm going to have a sort of relaunch by changing my name.

"I mean, at the moment, everyone knows me as Charles, which has got sort of negative connotations. You know, chaps having their heads cut off and sleeping with orange-sellers – that sort of business. Well, you see, I've actually got hundreds of names that might be less of a problem. Like George, for instance."

Camilla looked puzzled. Where was this leading? In what way could a name be a problem? "So, do I have to call you Gazza instead of Chazza?"

Charles ignored her interruption. "Some of the adviser fellows thought that if I'm going to change my name to George, then maybe you should change your name as well."

Camilla was still confused. "You don't expect people to call me George as well?"

"No, Cammers," replied an exasperated Charles. "These chaps who've decided I should be called George have suggested that you should be given a new name as well. One that's really popular and that the British public would really go for."

There was a long silence as Charles groped for a tactful way to tell his new wife what the Royal focus group had come up with. "It's Diana," he finally stammered.

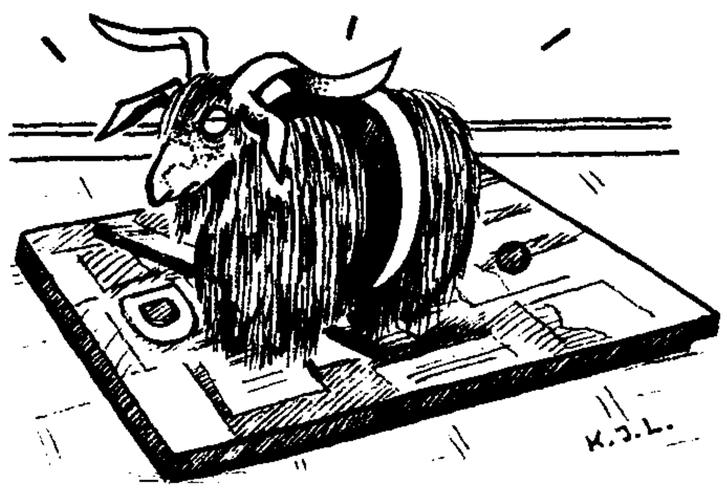
At once the East Anglian sky turned black and blizzards howled across the bleak and barren landscape.

(To be continued)

Pseuds Corner

Both carnally and commercially his behaviour has indicated that he might benefit from keeping in mind the opening declaration of Shakespeare's Sonnet 129: "Th'expense of spirit in a waste of shame is lust in action."

HUGH McILLVANNEY on Sven-Goran Eriksson, *Sunday Times*



It's the same with the wonderful Monogram, the stuffed Angora goat Rauschenberg found in an office supply store on 23rd Street in the early 1950s and encircled with a car tyre. One looks at it remembering that the goat is an archetypal symbol of lust, so Monogram is the most powerful image of anal intercourse ever to emerge from the rank psychological depths of modern art.

ROBERT HUGHES
Guardian

Every day I have a coffee enema. I really love them. I might even be a bit addicted, because they provide this wonderful capsule of time to read or just get some space. I use organic coffee – Fair Trade of course. You can buy a special enema blend which isn't drinkable, but I usually use Guatemalan, which is.

GINNY FRASER – 'A Life in The Day'
Sunday Times

Pseuds Educational

In February this year Angela Piccini (formerly Research Associate on Baz Kershaw's AHRC-funded PARIP project) took up a new post in the department. She is now one of two Academic Fellows attached to the Arts Faculty research theme, 'Performativity, Place, Space', led by Professor Martin White.

The fellowship will see Angela working in two key areas: spatializations of performing arts information in databases and the performativity of mediatized archaeologies as productive of place and space.

From Dramagrad, the University of Bristol's Drama department alumni newsletter

The Robert Owen Society is the Strategic Body for the Robert Owen Society Family of Co-operative and Social Enterprise organisations. The Robert Owen Learning Academy is the Society's College and is being developed on a hub satellite and spoke model across the Society's extensive delivery footprint.

From a job advertisement in the *Ludlow Advertiser*

CONTRIBUTORS: Liam Downey, Mona Clark, Louis Hellman, David Edwards, Alistair J.S. MacDonald.

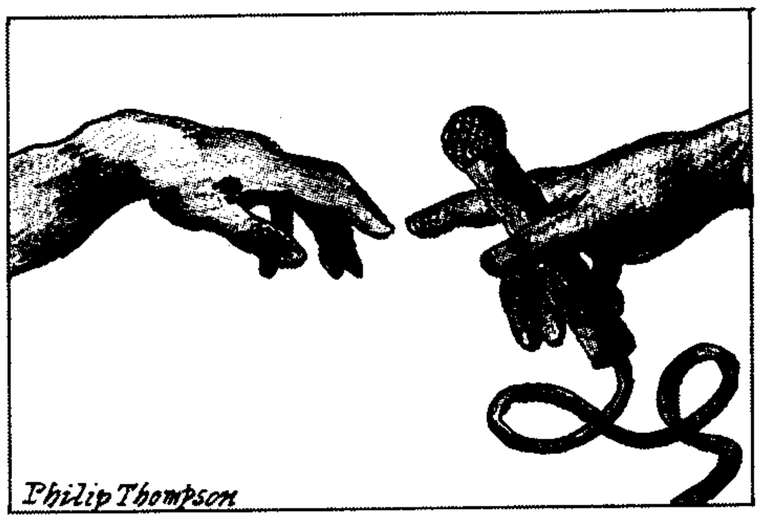
£10 paid for all entries

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "Reverend Kyle Lake had just finished delivering a sermon entitled 'Surprise me God'," Terry Esau told listeners to his Coast to Coast radio show in Waco, Texas, "and he was getting ready to baptize the first repentant sinner. He was standing waist-high in the water, alongside a woman who was waiting to be baptised, and he reached for a corded microphone, so he could address his 800-strong congregation. As he did so, there was a jolt of electricity, a loud bang, a blue flash, an appalling expletive, and a puff of smoke. And when it cleared, Rev. Lake was floating dead in the water, although the woman beside him was miraculously unharmed."

Callers to Esau's radio show asked if he thought that God had been answering a prayer when the thirty-three-year-old pastor was killed, during a service at the University Baptist



Church in Waco. "I wish I could answer that," he replied. "I honestly don't know. Does God cause everything to happen? Or are there just electrical laws that were violated on that day? God is not intimidated by our questions, but I simply cannot explain why the tragedy occurred.

"Rev. Lake used to have a bumper sticker on his car that read 'Shit Happens.' And if he was here today, I think he'd probably say that he was just in a really bad place when the laws of nature were violated. But whatever the explanation, I'm glad to hear that Churches across America are now advising that only wireless microphones should be used when pastors are performing full-immersion baptisms." *(Associated Baptist Press, 6/11/05. Spotter: Brendan Joseph O'Byrne)*

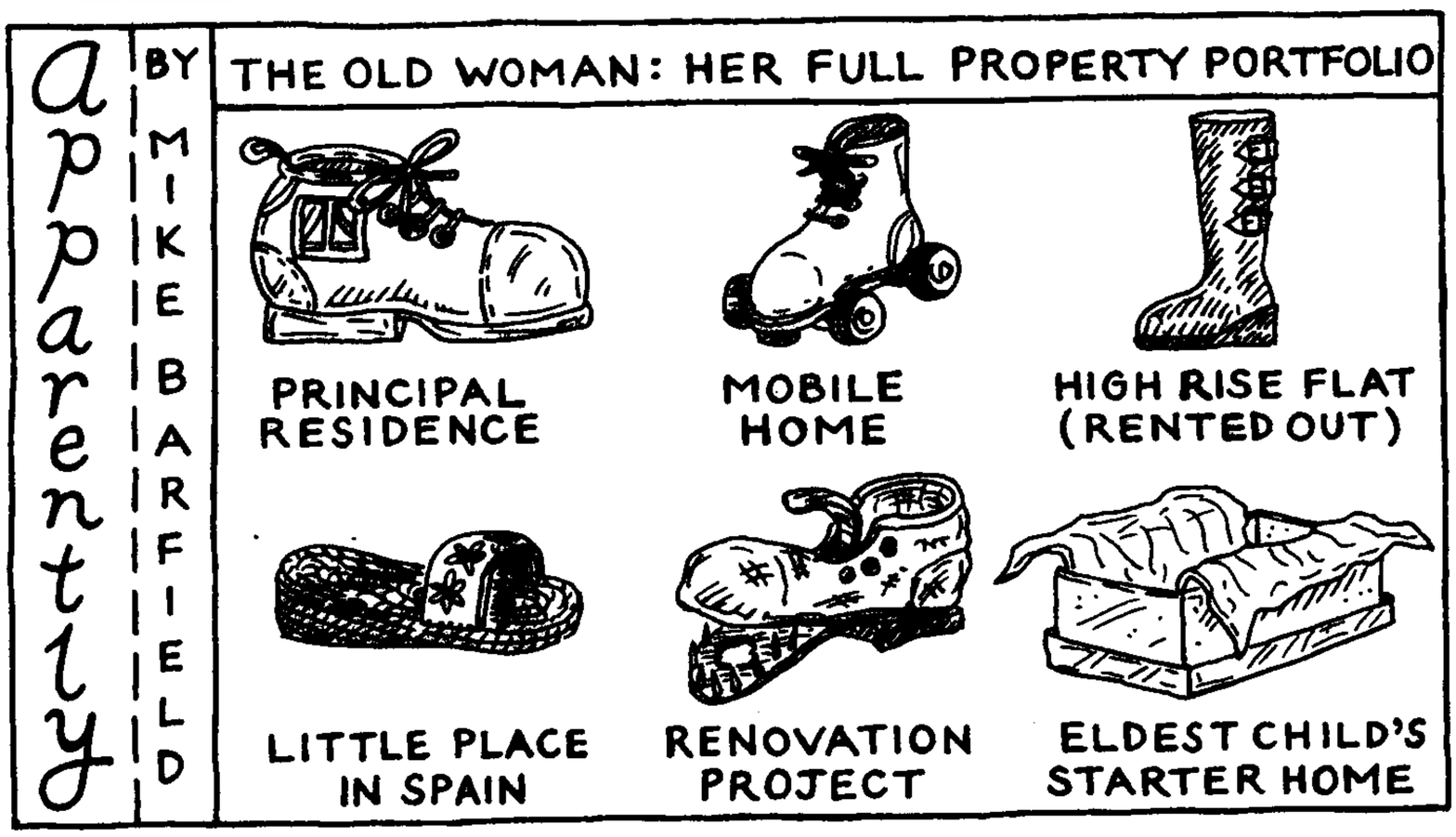
– ● –

● *"We were flabbergasted when we first discovered what was going on at the sewage works," Cliff Satherley of the Motueka Community Board told reporters in Auckland, "because it defies all logic. It should be obvious to everyone that sewage ponds are unsuitable places for recreation, but we've found canoeists and kayakers there at weekends, paddling their way through the untreated slurry, and even some foolhardy swimmers diving into the filth. You'd think that the smell alone would be enough to keep people away, but we also have barbed wire fences and locked gates to dissuade them. Yet people keep breaking in there to swim, kayak, and picnic, in spite of the dangers to health. The council have said they will erect more warning signs at the site, but really, you'd think that common sense would prevail."* (New Zealand Herald, 30/6/05. Spotter: Phil Smith)

– ● –

● "Some people blame the territory's frenetic work ethic for men's lack of interest in sex," Grace Wong of the Family Planning Association told a press conference in Hong Kong, "but there are many other theories. Perhaps our education system is to blame, because even discussing sexual matters in Chinese schools is strictly taboo. And I often see married couples who are not familiar with their own body parts, or with those of their partner, and who don't even realise that males can get an erection, or ejaculate. But whatever the reason is, there's no doubt from numerous international surveys that we rank at the bottom of the international list of lovers, and that many Hong Kongers just don't know what to do between the sheets."

Wong was commenting on a number of recent international polls, all of which had placed the island in or near bottom place in sexual matters. "Durex's last poll showed that the French have sex twice as often as Hong Kongers," she added, "while another one suggested that most Hong Kong men would prefer to go to work rather than have sex. In most countries, Family Planning Associations advise clients on contraception, but in our case, most enquiries are simply about what to do in bed. We hear from hundreds of married couples each year who have no idea how to have sex, who don't understand the physical changes associated with sexual response, and who sometimes don't even know where their sex organs are. Frankly, given what I hear on a daily basis, I'm amazed that this is such a crowded island." *(AFP, 4/7/05. Spotter: Robert Harland)*



ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo!

And I think the first thing we all need to do this week is to calm down, take a few deep breaths and count to ten (and the kids of today *can* count to ten, I'm happy to say, whatever some people might like to claim!).

In the last few days, voices have been raised in anger, tempers have frayed, a few extremists have had a field day – and we now need to take stock and think very carefully about where we go from here.

People have shouted at me from the back of the church, calling me an "idiot" and a "lunatic".

Mr Kinnock, who was a lay reader here in the 1980s (and, I have to say, a rather unpopular and unsuccessful one at that, although it would be uncharitable to point this out!) has even suggested that I should resign!

Well, he's perfectly entitled to think that and to make his views known to all and sundry!

Hey, that's what it's all about! If we believe in anything, we surely all believe in the free and frank exchange of views and in people's rights to make their opinions known, however stupid and ignorant they may be!

I respect their right to speak out. But they in turn must respect my right to ignore them! How could I possibly continue to run this parish if, every time I want to do something, we all have to sit for hours around a table, discussing whether it is a good idea or not?

Dear me, if we operated like that, nothing would ever get done at all!

No, when you appointed me as your vicar, you didn't appoint Mr Kinnock, did you?

Look, we all believe in freedom of speech. We all need to respect the points of view of other people, even if we disagree with them.

We all need to practise restraint, tolerance and open-mindedness in what could otherwise become a very dangerous and ugly debate.

I'm talking, of course, about all those who have questioned my plans to turn St Albion's School into a Kwikfit Selective Independent Beacon Academy.

Now some of you have expressed your views about this in rather a negative and extreme way.

You didn't appoint Mr Marshall-Andrews or Mrs Morris, did you – let alone Mr Prescott?!

All of which leads me to my sixth and final point. I am listening to your views, and I'm taking on board all that you have said! And that isn't a sign of weakness! Quite the contrary! It's a sign of strength!

As it says in the Good Book, "The tree that bends in the wind is stronger than the reed that snaps" *(Book of Aesop, 4.94)*.

So, to sum it up, our new Academy will not be selective, or independent, or a beacon, or sponsored by Kwikfit.

But apart from that, the plans will be exactly as I said they would be all along!

I couldn't put it any simpler than that, could I?

So, let's put an end to this so-called "clash of cultures" that threatens to destroy the civilised world of St Albion's as we know it!

Yours, walking the line,
"The Man In Black"

Tony

NEXT WEEK'S SERMON will be given by our guest preacher Ayatollah Imamad Bastardi on the text "Kill Thy Neighbour As Thyself".

The vicar's suggestions for changes to the church tower! As seen by Mr de la N.

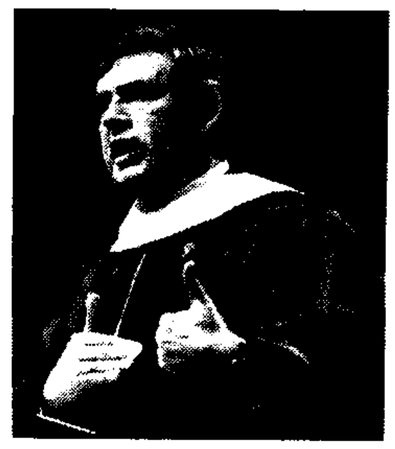
Women's Groups

Our speaker next month is none other than one of the country's best-known lawyers, Mrs Cherie Booth QC. As one of our leading experts on human rights, she will be talking about "The right to wear a wig and make a huge amount of money". Tickets at £20 each (no concessions) are sure to be in demand, so book early. Talk sponsored by the St Albion's "Friends of the Taliban".

WANTED

Former PCC member, now un-employed, seeks accommodation, but not very hard. In fact, not at all. If you know of a flat or house suitable for Mr Blunkett and his dog, do not contact him, as he is more than happy living for free in Grace And Favour Road.

A Message From Mr Brown



Hello,

And welcome to my message which from now on will be getting equal billing with the Vicar's! As you can see, I've been trying on the vestments and guess what...? They fit me perfectly! Some might say, they fit even better than they do the Vicar!

I just wanted to alert everyone to a series of addresses I shall be giving during Lent (or Borrowed, as I call it!). I shall be in the church on weekdays (8.30am-10pm), talking on the following subjects:

Monday: *Where are we going?*
Tuesday: *What is the future?*
Wednesday: *The way forward*
Thursday: *No turning back*
Friday: *Facing tomorrow*
Saturday: *The challenge ahead*

Of course, on Sunday, you will still have to listen to the Vicar – but not for long! We all admire him for the hard work he has put in over the last eight years – but it has to be said, he has left a lot for his successor to do.

And, for the record, the Vicar's suggestion in the last newsletter that I have taken up drinking tea in order to copy what he calls his "Big Tea Idea" ("The Third Cup" and all that) is absolute rubbish. I was drinking tea years before he was and, let's be honest, if anyone is likely to be stealing ideas, it's him. No offence, Tony, as you would say!

The Almost Reverend Gordon Brown (Church of Scotland),
Lay Preacher and Vicar-In-Waiting

This week's recipe comes from Mrs Kelly

CHUCKED EGG

1. Take one egg.
2. Break carefully over my head.

(Serves no purpose at all)

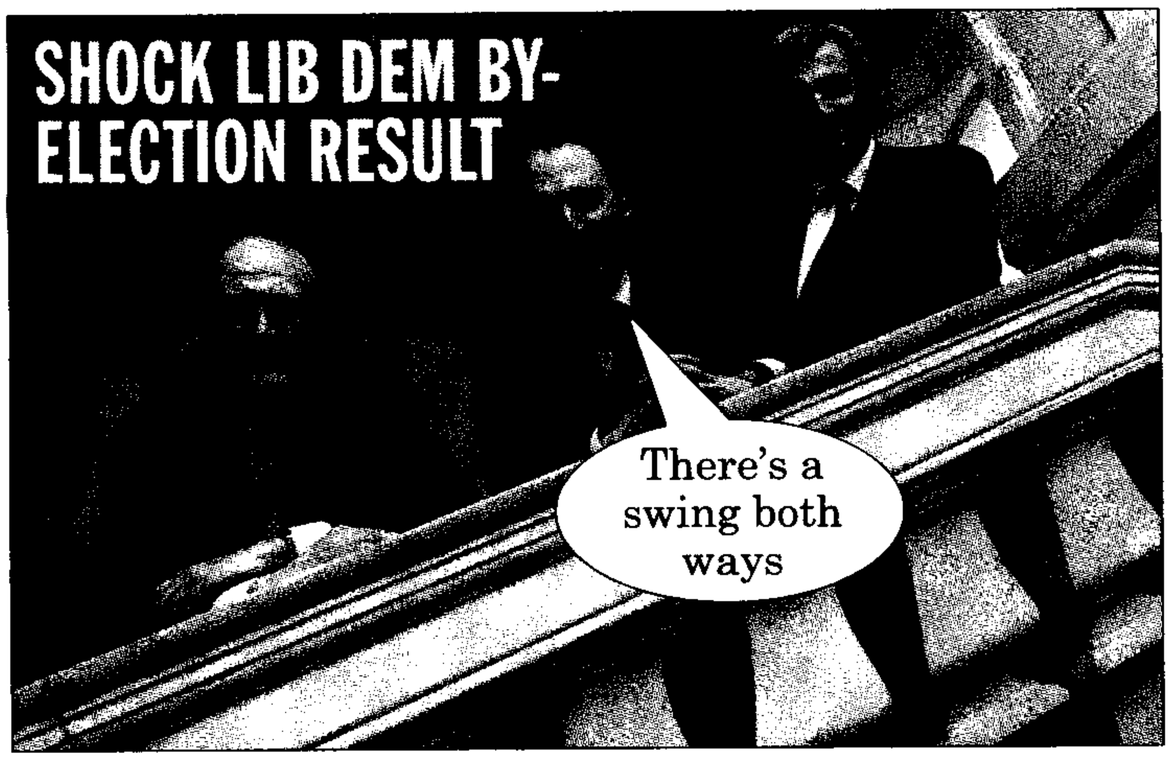
MYSTERY!!

The Vicar writes:

I have had a Valentine card containing the following very lovely message:

Roses are red,
Violets are blue,
There's only one person left
Who still loves you!
Mrs H. Blears

I wonder who could have sent it? T.B.



The Liberal Democrat Party
Another Apology

IN COMMON with all other magazines, Private Eye may have given the impression that the Liberal Democrats were a spent force in British politics, as a result of a number of high-profile scandals involving alcoholism, rent boys and bisexuality. Covers such as "We're all buggered" may have conveyed the message that Private Eye in some way considered that the future of the Liberal Democrat Party was in doubt.

We now realise that nothing could be further from the truth and their triumph in the Dunfermline by-election was totally predictable and that the electorate was entirely unconcerned by metropolitan gossip and personality-obsessed tittle-tattle.

We would like to apologise to Sir Ming Vase, the Chinese-born acting leader of the Liberal Democrat Party for any suggestion that he was old, cracked or broken.

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Sir Freddie Laker, The Father Of Low-Cost Air Travel

So. Farewell
Then Sir
Freddie Laker –
The Father of
Low-Cost Air
Travel.

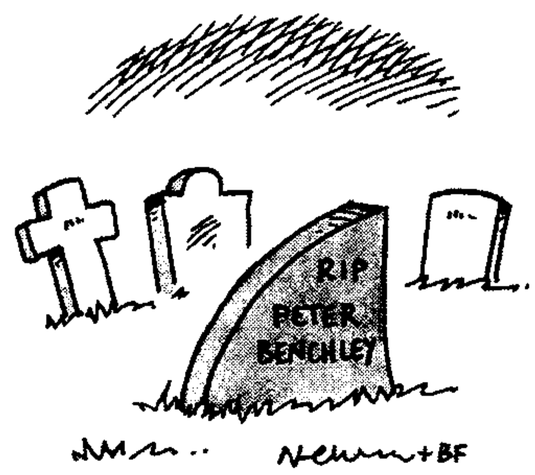
Now you have
Gone to Heaven
On a One-
Way Bargain
Ticket.

Yes, I can
Hear the announcement:
"Will Sir Freddie
Laker go to
Pearly Gate
Number 94 at
Once?"

And are
You I wonder
Now on a
No-Frills
Cloud

Where you have
To bring your
Own harp?

E.J. Thribb (17½)



ACQUITTED MAN OBVIOUSLY GUILTY

by **Everyone**

A MAN acquitted of the murder of his foster daughter by the courts was today found guilty by the newspapers after convincing evidence proved that the man Sion Jenkins looks as though he did it.

I mean, let's face it guv, who else could it have been? Stands to reason doesn't it? Look what his missus said – even she knows he did it. You know what I would do? String him up! It's the only language these deputy headmasters understand! Blimey!

© All newspapers.

MAN IN THE EYE

THE NEW EDITOR OF THE SPECTATOR

by Our Media Staff Phil Spectator

Who is he, the most powerful figure in British Journalism?

I CAN exclusively reveal that the new man filling the editorial hot seat at Britain's premier political magazine is an acerbic Scotsman with a long journalistic history who bears the nickname "Brillo", short for "Brilliant", which is the way his devoted staff have always described him. Others know him as "Pad", a reference to his habit of noting down inspired editorial ideas in his notebook. He is perhaps best known from his late night TV appearances where he sings "Is this the way to I'm a Brillo?" to huge audiences (Sid and Doris Portillo).

His avowed aim is to turn the Spectator into an even more boring magazine than it is now. "It is a difficult challenge," says Brillo, "but I will meet it head on."

What you will read in the new Brillo-edited Spectator:

- **Cameron's Task** by *Peter O'Bore*
- **Whither the Lib Dems?** by *Matthew D'Anconservative*
- **Bring Back Hunting** by *Charles Moore*
- **The European Crisis** by *Brillo McPad*
- **Dunfermline – Scotland's Boom City** by *Paddy McBrillo*
- **Cartoons** by *Castro, Castro, Castro* and *Brillo*.

(That's enough new-look Spectator. Ed.)

NEW INFORMAL TORY BALL

Yes, It's The Winter Olympics

Those Results In Full

Downhill Curling (Men's)

Gold Jorgen Smorgasbord (Sweden)
Silver Ingmar Herring (Norway)
Bronze Bjorn Bjornson (Abba)

2-Man Uphill Luge (Women's)

Gold Iceland
Silver Iceland
Bronze Findusland

4 x 400 Metres Sumo Ice-Skating Freestyle Relay

Lib Dem Gain
Monster Raving Islamist Party loses deposit *(Surely shome mishtake. Ed.)*

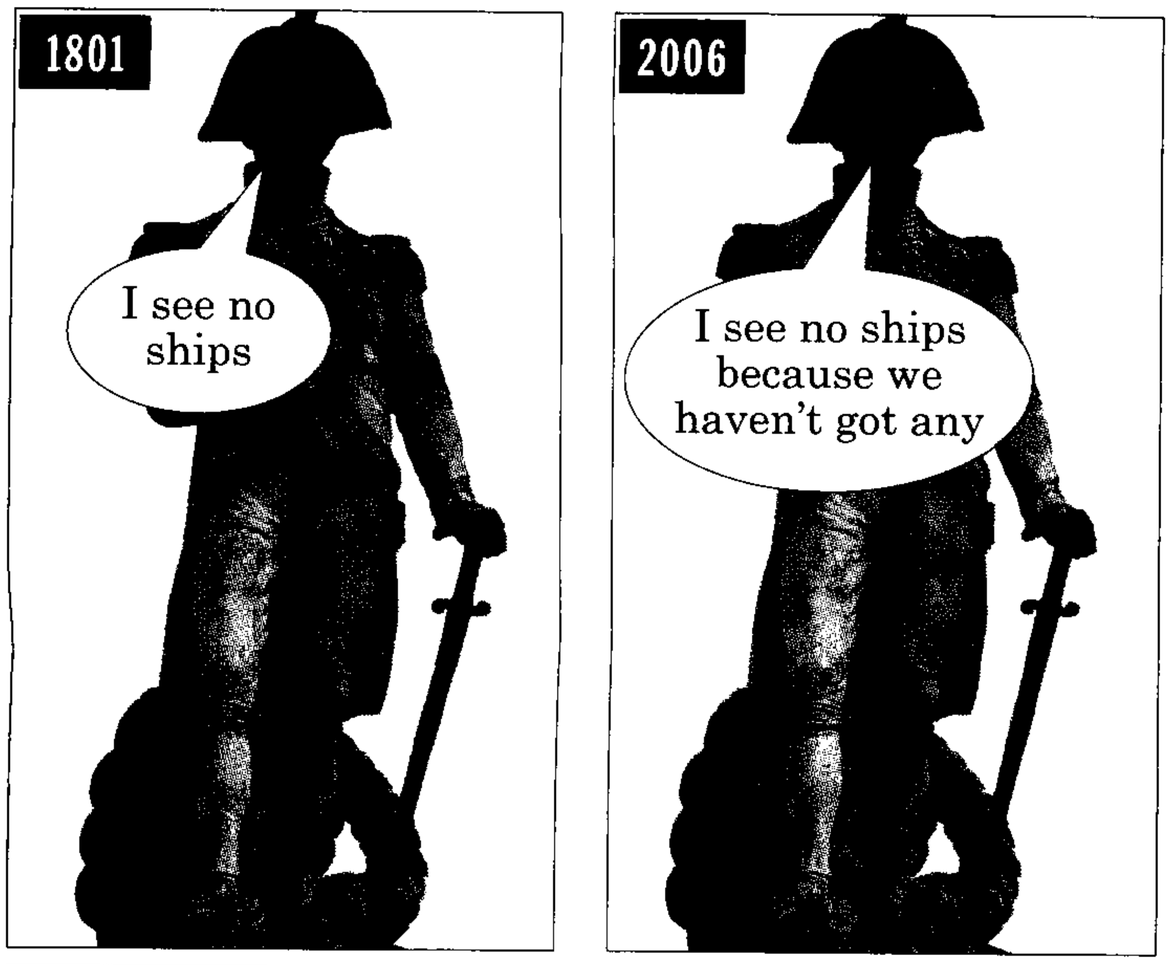
That Premiership Football Team in Full

CHEAT

DIVER FAKER ACTOR SCAMMER
BOGUS FRAUD CON SHAM
OUCH AARGH

MANAGER: WHINGER

THE ROYAL NAVY THEN AND NOW



MOST GRADUATES ILITERATE AND INNUMERABLE

by Our Trainee Staff **Ivor Degree** (B.A. Cantadd)

A SHOCK new report claims that recent graduates are leaving universities "unfit for employment".

Despite achieving good degreez, the graduates are apparently unable to, you know, construct an argument or whatever, which is rubbish, and like, don't understand numbers which is a billion percent wrong at least.

The report claimed that graduates were "indisciplined and unfocused on their work", whatever that means, and is this enough words yet it's time for Countdown on the telly *(You're fired. Ed.)*

Exclusive to the Daily Mail

DID ELVIS COMMIT SUICIDE IN A BIZARRE DEATH PACT WITH PRINCESS DIANA?

by **Phil Space**

ELVIS PRESLEY was the world's most famous rock star. We all know that the king of rock and roll died in a bathroom in his Gracelands mansion on August 16th 1977.

But now allegations have surfaced that Elvis committed suicide in a bizarre death pact with the Princess of Wales. But where's the proof for this extraordinary allegation? Well, these are the facts:

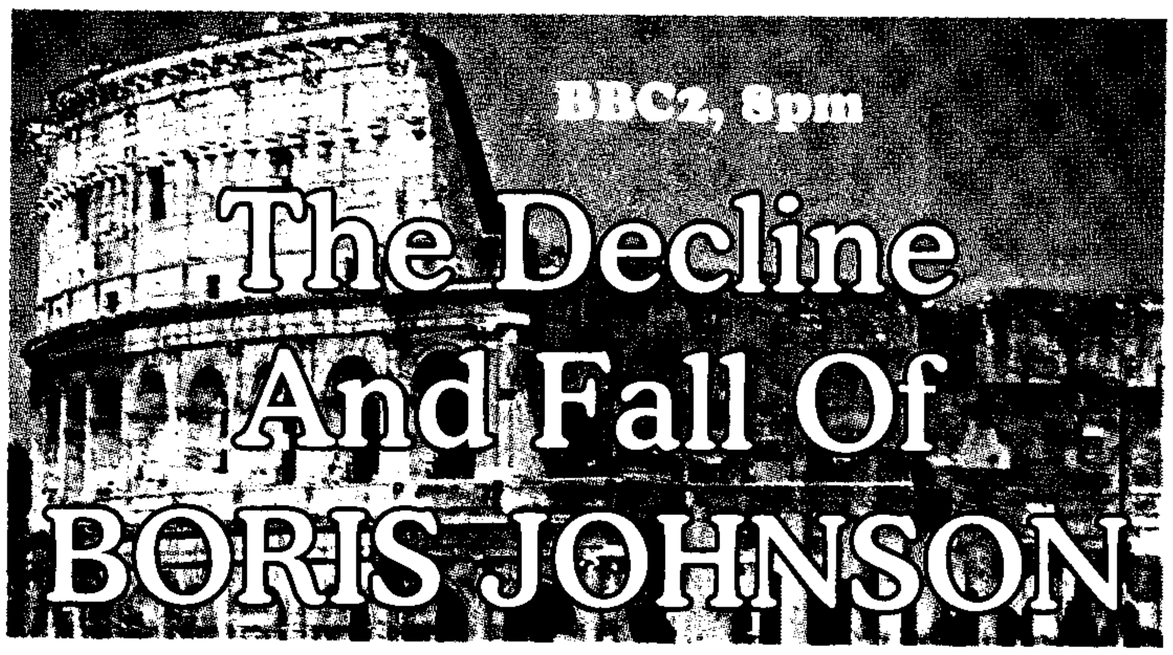
We know Elvis died. We also know that Princess Diana died. We also know that Princess Diana was married to a future King. We also know that Elvis was 'The King of Rock and Roll'. We also know that Diana was 'the Queen of Hearts'.

King, Queen... the parallels are extraordinary.

There can be little doubt that these facts point incontrovertibly towards the fact that the pair died in a bizarre suicide pact which the authorities went to extraordinary efforts to hush up.

TOMORROW ● Was JFK murdered to conceal his torrid love affair with Elvis?

TV – What You Missed (Again)



Part 94: Carry On Up The Petronella (Is this right? *Ed.*)

(Shot of blond, crumple-haired man stumbling through ruins of Colosseum)

Boris Johnson: Incredible! Blimey! To think that the Romans put up this terrific building millions of years ago. And yet the EU can't even sort out the drains.

(Cut to Boris sitting in agreeable cafe in Mainz, talking to man with pipe)

Boris: Professor Wurstwangler, you've been studying these Roman chaps for years, haven't you? They were pretty clever, weren't they? I mean, they invented the pyramids, the helicopter, the trouserpress... I mean, cripes, what's the EU even come up with?

Prof. Wurstwangler: Would you like to borrow a comb, Herr Johnson? Your hair is, how you say, all over the shop.

Johnson: Cripes, can we cut this bit?

(Cut to Boris, standing in huge Roman theatre in Libyan desert)

Johnson: Incredible! I'm now in Libya, which is only a couple of hours away in an aeroplane from my house in Islington. The Romans couldn't do that, could they? It just shows what progress we've made under this EU thing. Is that right? Anyway, I've really enjoyed going to all these amazing places. *(Mobile rings)* Sorry, darling, I can't speak now, I'm on the television.

Female voice on phone: You bastard! You're with that woman, aren't you?

Boris *(voice fading with background)*: Vote Conservative. This Cameron chap's awfully good...

(Credits, silly music)

TV Highlights

Is The Documentary About The Death Of The Sitcom Dead? *BBC2*

ALAN YENTOB introduces a film which explores the theory that the documentary charting the demise of the sitcom has finally had its day. With dull clips from all the other classic sitcom documentaries and contributions from Alan Yentob, Alan Yentob and Alan Yentob.

NEXT WEEK: The History Of The Spoon. Alan Yentob looks at the role of the spoon in design history and poses naked with only a spoon covering up his (That's enough. Ed.)

8-13 Campbell hardens after Hughes admits gay tendencies

Racing Post

REID DENIES ARMY CUTS HAVE GONE TOO FAR

MUSLIMS CALL FOR DAY OF ANGER

by Our Cartoon Staff **Terry Fide**

MILITANT Islamic groups in Britain have called for a day of anger at the outrageous behaviour of the British media who have given them no excuse to be angry.

"It is a disgrace," said spokesman Imamad Bastahdi. "The British newspapers have blatantly refused to print the offensive cartoons and the TV stations only showed them for a couple of seconds.

"How on earth are we meant to get offended, whip up a mob and demand that everyone involved be murdered?"

Mr Bastahdi also said that Muslims like himself were furious at the British Government who had denounced the Danish cartoonists and also at the British police who had quite deliberately failed to arrest anyone for incitement to murder.

"It is a conspiracy by the entire British establishment to deny us our fundamental human rights to go berserk, burn down buildings and threaten to kill people.

"We are really angry," he said, "and what makes us even angrier are the thousands of so-called 'moderate' muslims who managed to protest in Trafalgar Square without looking like lunatics and *(cont. p. 94)*

*"Remember the good old days when you were scared of **me**?"*

CLASSIC TALES FROM DENMARK

by Hans Muslim Anderson

No. 94. The Little Match Girl

ONCE upon a time there was a little girl who set fire to the Danish Embassy and went to heaven.

(The End)

Advertisement

new from mullahcare

The I ♥ Al-Qaida Hat

Your little one will look quite terrifying in this shocking beanie hat. Comes with matching 'Behead The Infidel' babygrow and matching booties, one saying '9' and one '11'!

Exclusive to mullahcare
Your one-stop shop for all baby's pro-terrorist outfits!

Nursery Times

Friday, February 17, 2006

NEVERLAND REJOICES AT HOOK ARREST

by J.M. Barrie-Fantoni

THE Neverland police finally swooped on the most notorious pirate in Neverland, Captain Hook, after keeping him under "close surveillance" for over 100 years.

Said Chief Inspector Wendy Darling, "After studying millions of hours of CCTV footage of the alleged pirate, we at last feel we have enough evidence to charge him."

Rum Do

Hook appears, inciting his followers to engage in acts of piracy, ordering small children to walk the plank, and brandishing a cutlass in a manner likely to cause a breach of the peace.

When asked why the police had failed to act earlier against a man who was clearly a dangerous pirate, Chief Inspector Darling explained, "We have to maintain a very delicate balance between doing something and doing nothing. We chose to do nothing, which is what we call 'smart policing'."

On Other Pages

● Darling Children Taken Into Care **2**

● "My coke-fuelled love romps with Peter Pan" by Tinkerbell **8**

PLUS

● Our page 3 Lagoon Lovelies – mermaids as you've never seen them.

SNOW WHITE IN RECORD DIVORCE SETTLEMENT

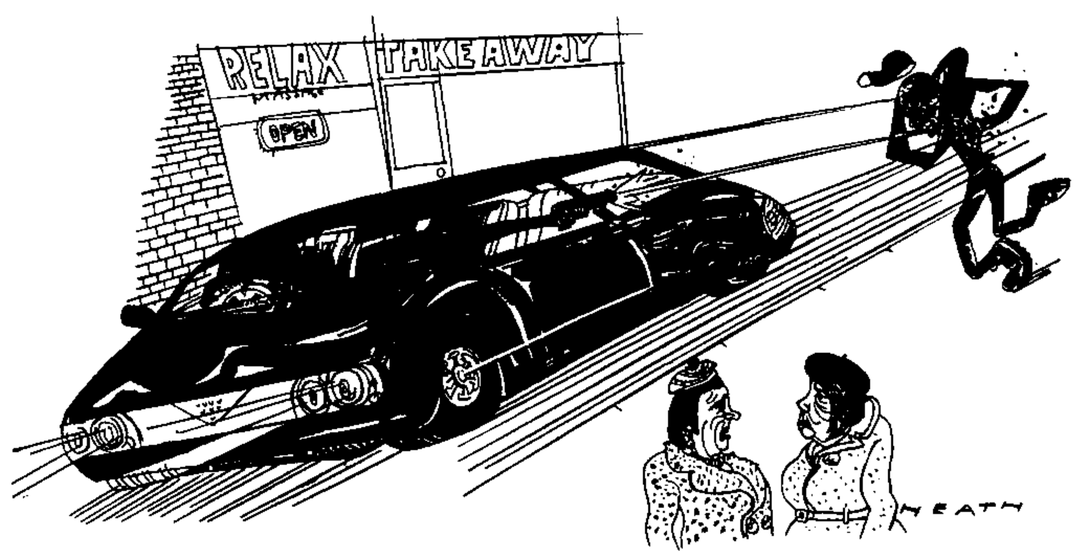
by Our Legal Staff
Joshua Rumplestiltskinberg

DESPITE only being married to Prince Charming for three weeks, Snow White was today awarded a lump sum of half his kingdom with an annual maintenance grant of a gold egg-laying goose, a singing harp and some magic beans.

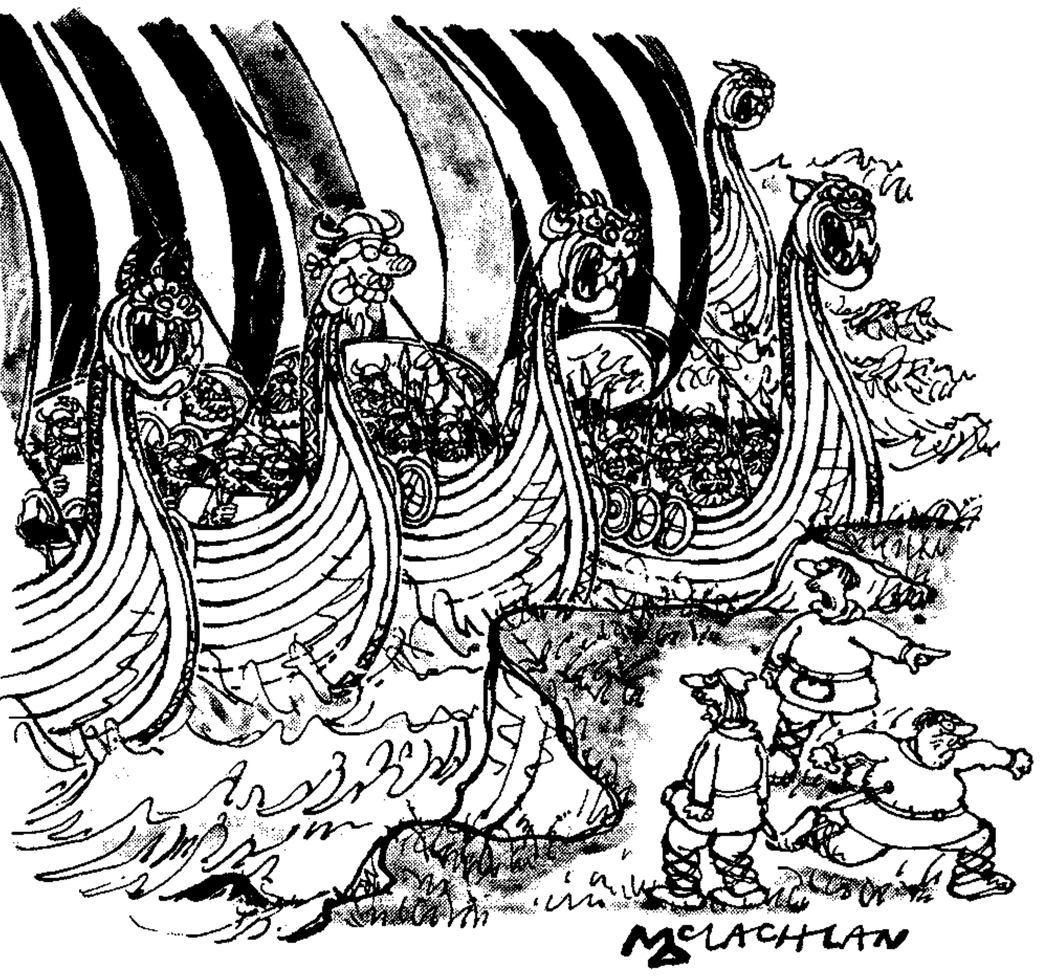
Prince Charming had tried to contest the case, saying that his ex-wife had been involved with a number of men (7) and had no right to his fortune.

However, counsel for Snow White, a Mr Greedy from the firm Greedy, Sleazy, Nosy, Dodgy, Ropey, Slippery and Carter-Ruck, told the court:

"Prince Charming owes his entire career to Ms White. Without her, he would be a nobody with nothing. Besides, he initiated the breakdown of the marriage by being seen kissing Sleeping Beauty and partying with Cinderella *(cont. Court 94)*



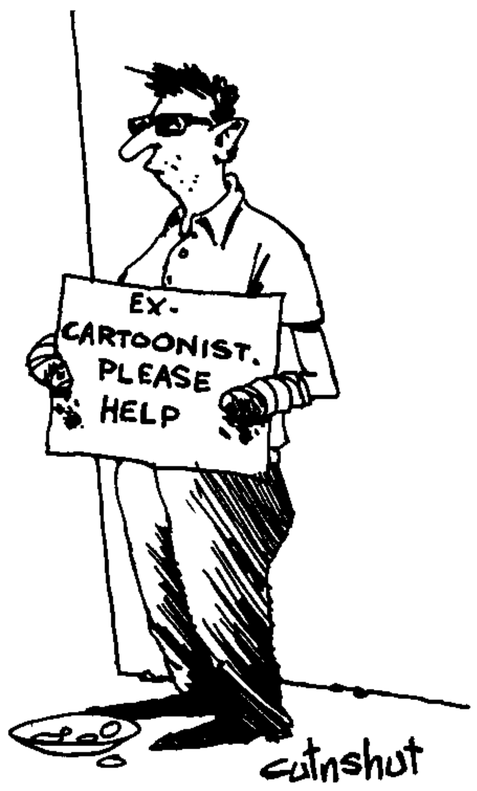
"I find that people are so rude nowadays!"



*"Sound the alarm – it's the Danes and they've brought **cartoonists** with them!"*

Where cartoonists hide

"I don't suppose you want a 'Danish'?"



"Uh oh... the C of E have found out we've got a cartoon of the infant Jesus""

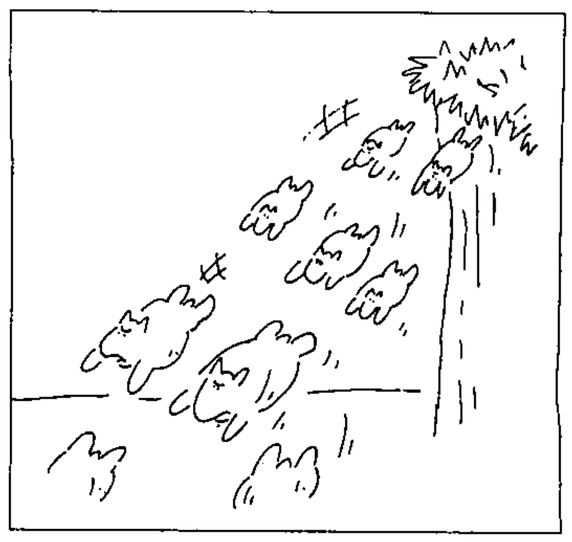
LEMMINGS PROTEST AT CARTOON INSULT

by Our Media Staff **Cliff Top**

THE International Lemming Association has threatened mass protests at what it described as "grotesque stereotyping" of the Lemming Community by western cartoonists.

Said a spokesman "It is very offensive to depict lemmings as mindless creatures following their leaders to commit suicide by jumping off a cliff."

"These images of so-called suicide lemmings are an insult to all decent lemmings and are designed to propagate a false impression of lemmings."



He continued "Now if you'll excuse me, I can see one of my colleagues jumping off a cliff and I must go and follow him."

EYE PROBE

IS THERE AN ABU HAMZA IN YOUR STREET?

10 Tell-tale signs that your next door neighbour could be a dangerous terrorist.

1. Bushy black beard.
2. Squinty eyes.
3. Funny teeth.
4. Hook instead of hand.
5. 10,000 videos of himself inciting huge crowds of followers to commit mass murder.
6. Electric toothbrush easily convertible into rocket launcher.
7. Cartoon in front window showing Jews being eaten by pigs.
8. Rough Guide to the 'Top 100 Places in Europe to Blow Yourself Up' *(published by 72 Virgin Press)*.
9. Discount card for local massage parlour ('Hook Jobs a Speciality' – reduced terms for the disabled).
10. 1 copy of the Sunday Telegraph crossword half completed.

WARNING

If you have a Hamza-style world terrorist leader living on your doorstep, ring the police at once and within only 10 years they might just possibly come round to arrest him, although it is more likely that they will come round immediately to arrest you for inciting racial hatred.

"At Murrayfield I support Scotland, at The Oval I support England, in the Ryder Cup I support Europe," he said; "I've no difficulty with Brutishness [sic] and I don't think the rest of Britain should have any difficulty with Scottishness either."

Sir Menzies Campbell, quoted in handout distributed at BBC4 'Any Questions?' event

POLICE LOG

Neasden Central Police Station

Office hours: 9-12 Mon-Tues (except Tuesday)

14 February 2006

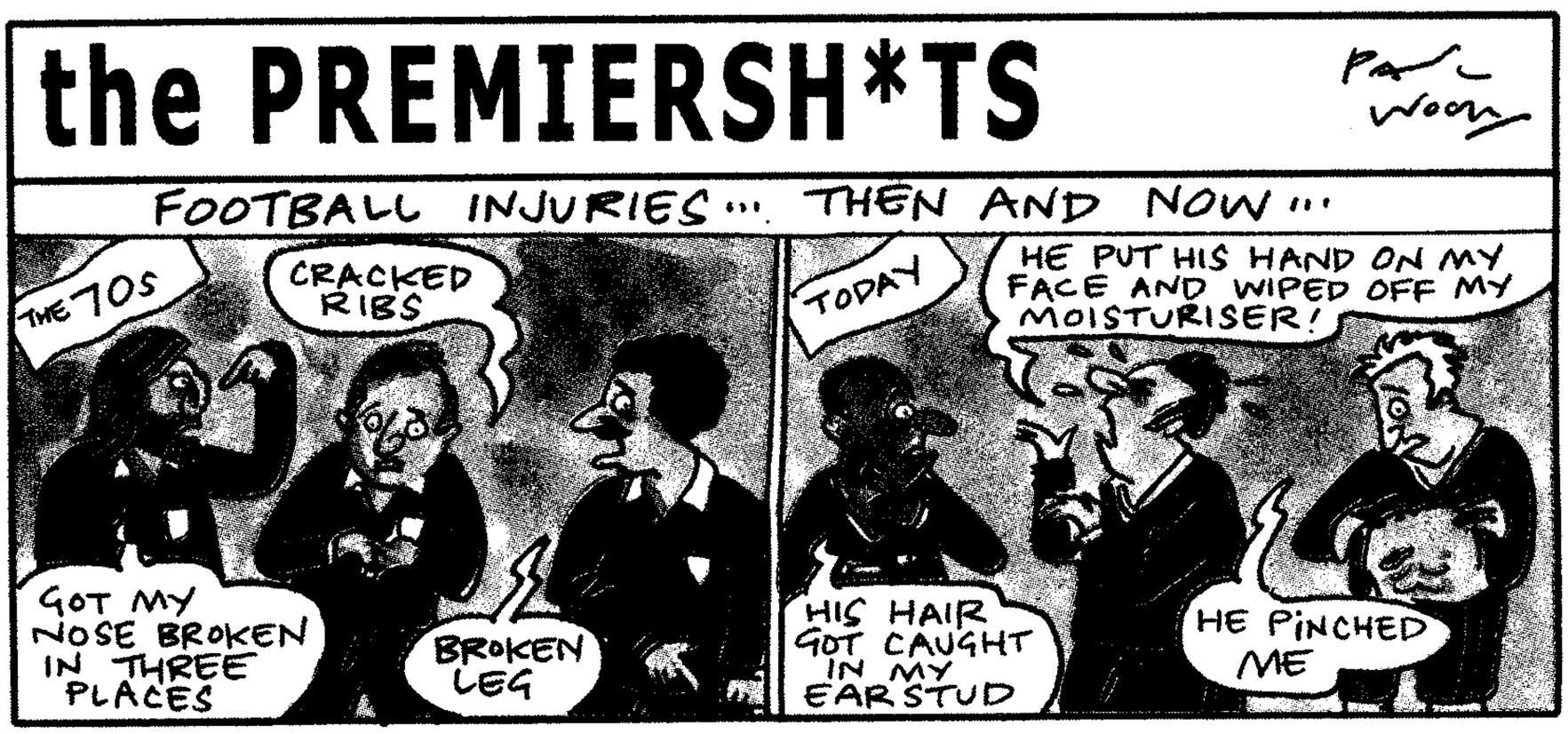
0428 hrs PC Blenkinsop reported in after test-driving a police vehicle the wrong way round the North Circular, between Exit 10 (Ballsover by-pass) and Exit 12 (World Of Fences). He reported having achieved an average speed in excess of 159 mph, thus breaking the station record previously held by the late PC Forsyth (146 mph). Blenkinsop incurred only 3 civilian casualties during his five-minute drive and has been recommended for promotion.

0800 hrs Applications were considered for would-be recruits to the Neasden force. Of the 612 applicants, 552 were disqualified immediately on the grounds that they were white, male, physically fit and in all other ways met the requirements for the job. Following Home Office guidelines, the successful applicants were eventually narrowed to three, all of whom conformed to the new guideline specifications: i.e. they were disabled, of ethnic descent, were members of the transgender community and were educationally challenged. They also showed familiarity with the justice system, as they all had distinguished criminal records. The successful candidates were welcomed to our team in the canteen during our customary mid-morning break (1000-1200 hrs). Mrs Prendergast, our canteen assistant, was placed under arrest for serving Danish bacon, a clear attempt to incite religious hatred against the Muslim members of the force (none). Mrs Prendergast was later admitted to hospital after suffering an unfortunate fall in the cells.

1245 hrs Call received from the proprietor of the Londis store in Heathcoat-Amory Street to the effect that he had detained a shoplifter in possession of 12 jars coffee (Fair Trade, decaff), 6 packets Hobnob biscuits, 1 VHS cassette ('Come On The Squirrels, A History of Neasden FC'), 2 packets Dairylea Cheese-Style Slices, 1 copy Nuts magazine and 1 packet of Werther's Originals. The total value of the items was estimated to be £43.75, placing them well below the new £75 threshold necessary to establish that an offence has been committed. A 12-man armed response unit was immediately despatched to arrest the manager, Mr Ganesh, for wasting police time. His arrest was duly enforced with very few civilian casualties. The alleged "shoplifter" was given a lift back to his hostel and offered counselling following the breach of his human rights. Two para-legal community support officers were detailed to assist him in preparing a compensation claim against Mr Ganesh.

1430 hrs Following representations from the Neasden Jihad League, all available officers were instructed to escort members of the League on their planned demonstrations at the premises of the Danish furniture company Ikea. The purpose of the police escort was to protect the protestors' right to display placards carrying such slogans as "Kill The Infidels", "We Want Holocaust Now!" and "Death To The Cartoonists!" It was necessary to ensure their freedom of protest against any interference by members of the public. During the demonstration a number of arrests were made involving persons who were seeking to incite religious hatred against the protestors by engaging them in dialogue. These included the Rt Rev Moses Sentanugu, the Bishop of Neasden, Rabbi Rachel Coren of the Liberal Reformed Orthodox Synagogue in Pricerite Road, and Dr Sylvester Dawkins, Chair of the Neasden Chapter of the Seventh-Day Atheists. The peaceful demonstration went off without further incident, apart from the setting fire to the premises of Messrs Ikea & Co, the unfortunate Swedish retailer, and the beheading of a small number of the firm's staff.

1930 hrs The station was closed to permit all officers to attend a "gala dinner" at the Star Of Basra restaurant, to celebrate the acquittal of PCs Trigger and Happy on charges of homicide, following their shooting of a member of the public for carrying a dangerous chair leg. A toast was drunk to the two officers in honour of their great victory, and they were granted six months' compassionate golfing leave in the Algarve.


the PREMIERSH*TS
PAUL WOOLEY
FOOTBALL INJURIES ... THEN AND NOW ...
THE 70S
CRACKED RIBS
GOT MY NOSE BROKEN IN THREE PLACES
BROKEN LEG
TODAY
HE PUT HIS HAND ON MY FACE AND WIPED OFF MY MOISTURISER!
HIS HAIR GOT CAUGHT IN MY EARSTUD
HE PINCHED ME

Advertisement

Westminster Massage Service

Discreet, classy, government offers stimulating massage of latest violent crime figures.

Experienced staff offer relaxed, professional service. Satisfaction guaranteed.

Ring top buzzer, Number 10 Downing Street and ask for Tony or Gordon.

That New Over-75s Driving Test In Full To Ensure They Are Fit For Today's Roads

When someone cuts you up a roundabout, do you wind down the window and...

a) scream foul-mouthed racial abuse at them?

b) give them the finger, then spit at them?

c) brandish the baseball bat you keep under the seat threatingly at them?

d) All of the above.

You are approaching a pedestrian crossing. A woman pushing a pram has just stepped out onto it. Do you...

a) speed up, start blowing your horn and laugh as she scrambles back onto the pavement?

b) not notice her because you're out of your head on drink and drugs?

c) All of the above.

You are snapped by a speed camera while doing 60 mph in a 30 mph zone. What do you use to smash the speed camera to pieces when you return there in the dead of night?

a) a hammer?

b) a pick-axe?

c) a JCB digger?

d) All of the above.

(That's enough modern driving test. Ed)

'WE'RE NOT GOING TO CUT AND RUN' Reid Spells It Out

by Our Political Staff **Lunchtime O'Bore**

"WE'RE not going to cut and run." That was the clear message spelled out today by Defence Secretary Dr John Reid, as he outlined the government's plans to withdraw troops from Iraq as soon as possible.

"We're going to see the job through," he pledged, "and as soon as the job is through, then will be the time to implement our two-part strategy, first to cut, and then, at the appropriate time, to run."

Reid My Lips

But Dr Reid denied that the British Government would set the timetable for the orderly cutting and running of British troops.

"The responsibility for that lies firmly and squarely with the Iraqi government," he said, "as soon as there is one.

"Only when we tell them to ask us to leave will we begin the countdown to the process of cutting and running. And as long as the Americans agree, that is when we will implement Operation Dunkirk."

STOP PRESS

■ **Reid Orders Remainder of British Army Into Afghan Danger Zone** – "Operation 'Charge of Light Brigade' vital to future of Afghan democracy," says no one.

MR DAVID CAMERON An Apology

IN RECENT weeks, in common with all other newspapers, we may have given the impression that Mr David Cameron was a towering figure who had transformed the fortunes of the Conservative Party by his charisma, leadership skills and ability to make Mr Blair look foolish at the Dispatch Box.

We now realise, after Mr Cameron's performance at yesterday's Question Time, that this impression is entirely false and contains not a scintilla of truth. We accept that the new Conservative leader is in fact a hopeless lightweight and an empty poseur, whom Mr Blair has no difficulty in swatting like a fly. We apologise to Mr Hague, Mr Duncan Smith and Mr Howard for suggesting that Mr Cameron might in any sense be a better leader than them.

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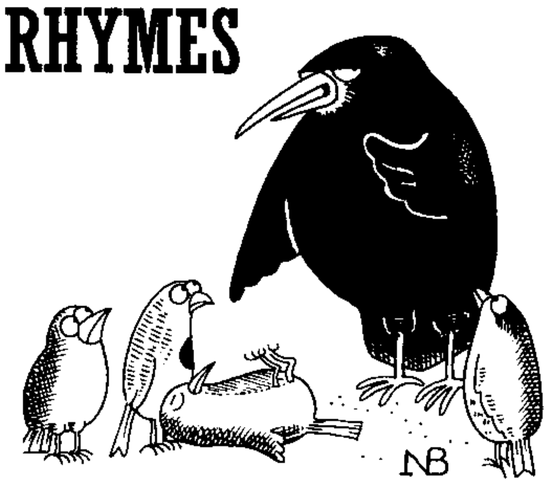
MODERN NURSERY RHYMES



Who killed Cock Robin?
"I," said the Rook,
"He gave me a funny look."

Late News

BROWN IS THE NEW BROWN

GORDON Brown has revealed in a major interview in the Daily Mirror how being a parent has changed him.

"I'm a completely different person now. Instead of being a miserable, power-hungry, dour, jealous, brooding Scot, I'm now a miserable, power-hungry, dour, jealous, brooding Scot with a child," said Gordon *(cont. p. 94)*

BLUNKETT SLAMS BLUNKETT

THE FORMER Home Secretary David Blunkett has launched a devastating attack on the former Home Secretary for delays in prosecuting Abu Hamza.

"My best guess is that whoever that was, he was probably too busy shagging other men's wives to do his job properly" said a disgusted David *(cont. p. 94)*

DOHERTY FOUND 'FAMOUS'

BABYSHAMBLES singer Pete Doherty was today found 'famous' as he escaped a jail sentence after appearing in court on drugs charges.

"Despite never actually making a hit record, I have always maintained that I was famous and continue to do so," said Pete *(cont. p. 94)*

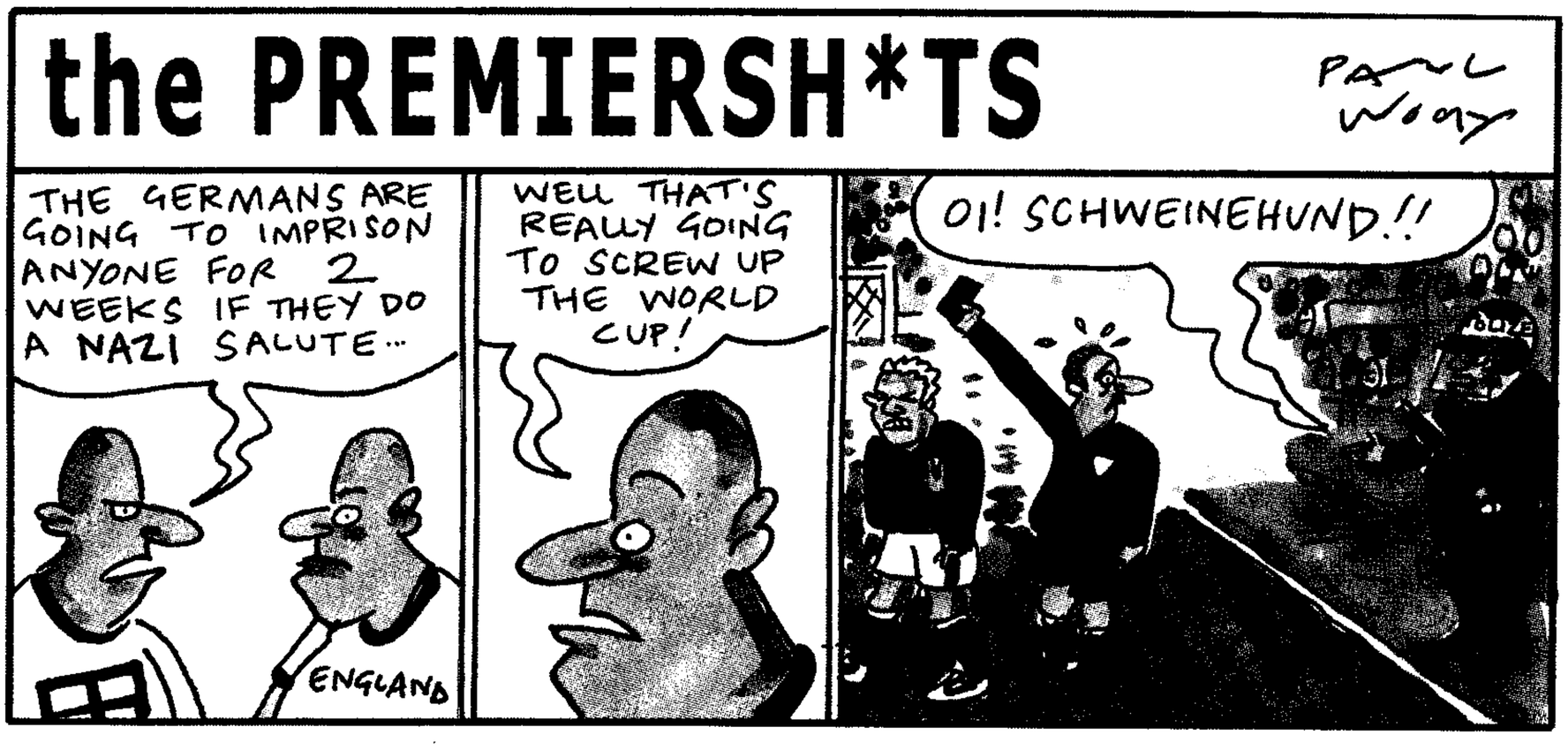
Radio Highlights

The Moral Maze

Radio 4

MICHAEL PORTILLO joins the Moral Maze panel for a lively discussion about the ethics of adultery. Their first witness this week is a businessman who claims to have photographic evidence that Portillo is *(cont 94 kHz)*

the PREMIERSH*TS


PAUL WOOD
THE GERMANS ARE GOING TO IMPRISON ANYONE FOR 2 WEEKS IF THEY DO A NAZI SALUTE...
ENGLAND
WELL THAT'S REALLY GOING TO SCREW UP THE WORLD CUP!
OI! SCHWEINEHUND!!

DIARY

JORDAN

I'd been working my arse off. Me being me, I felt like a nice change, so I booked into the Clinic for a nice change of boobs.

Same clinic that fat bitch Victoria so-called Beckham used, but her boobs still don't have any life of their own, do they? I don't know what David sees in them (not much, considering he's always on the pull!)

Hits on the Jordan website was down 20 per cent last year, which well pissed me off, so I had to get my boobs modernised ASAP. Big, bigger or biggerer? Or maybe I should go for littler, for a change? Basically, after nearly two years with the same old boobs, I was after something well different.

The doctor – phwoar, phwoar and fucking phwoar, talk about a well-fit body but he must of been gay because he never even tried it on – showed me the brochure with its full-colour selection of brand new boobs for me to choose from.

"We could do you a pair of the Beckhams for 15% off," he said. "And we'd throw in an arse-lift." But I wasn't having no bargain basement, for all his sweet talking. What with the sponsorship, I get all my new boobs for free anyway – and that's before the magazine and DVD rights, so who's fretting?

"No disrespect, doctor," I said, flicking through the brochure, well-bored. "But I've had all these sizes before. Ain't you got nothing more exciting?"

That's when I had the great idea. It came like a flash from heaven.

"I'll have a third," I said. "Just think! Jordan with an extra boob! That's thirty three per cent extra – the TV companies will go well nuts for it, then we can revise the contract with OK! and the world rights will go for a fortune."

I told my manager about my plan for Boob 3. She didn't think it was such a great idea, she said – she thought two boobs was more normal.

"Thanks a lot for the vote of confidence," I replied. I thought, I don't need this aggro, I'm not going to be treated like shit, what's she ever done for me, she's history.

"Your fans might prefer the more natural two-boob look, Katie," she said. "And anyway where would you put a third boob?"

Talk about negative. The natural look is all very well if all you want to end up on is University Fucking Challenge. No-one disses my ideas and gets away with it. I was burning with anger.

"I'm Jordan," I said. "I'll put it where I fucking want." There's a load of body-areas with fuck all going on in them, they're each crying out for a third boob. Top of the head, small of the back, forehead, shoulder, just below the bum, behind the knee, wherever. The guys would go well mad for it – and just think of the publicity, we're talking quarter of a million minimum from The Sun per extra boob.

I decided to consult my husband Pete. He loves my boobs something rotten, and I knew he'd be all hands at the prospect of another. "Sounds great, babe," he said. "You put it where you want it. Hey, babe, d'ya wanna hear my latest song?"

"Thanks a lot, Pete!" I screamed. "You just ruined my fucking day! I tell you I'm gonna have an extra boob and you can't even be arsed to tell me where I should fucking put it. And no, I don't want to hear your latest fucking song, not now, not ever! And you can put that away while you're about it – I'm so not in the mood!"

I was fucking fuming, I can tell you. Not for the first time, I was going to have to go it alone. Recently, I've been going for a more sophisticated market, not just lad mags, so I definitely wanted my new boob somewhere tasteful. The doctor told me he thought it would look really in keeping if we put it in between the other two. "The bad news is it'll be a bit of a squeeze," he said, "But the good news is that it'll give you two cleavages."

"That'll potentially double her earnings, doctor," said my personal business manager, bringing out his pocket calculator. I always have him to hand before any of my major operations. "And with another bosom in the middle, we can launch a whole new Jordan Swimwear range, and let's face it, Katie, with all the extra press and TV coverage, they'll never be able to deny you that schoolgirl ambition of yours!"

"You mean I can at last become Principal Ballerina with the Royal Ballet?"

"With a third boob popping up through your tutu, how could they possibly refuse you?"

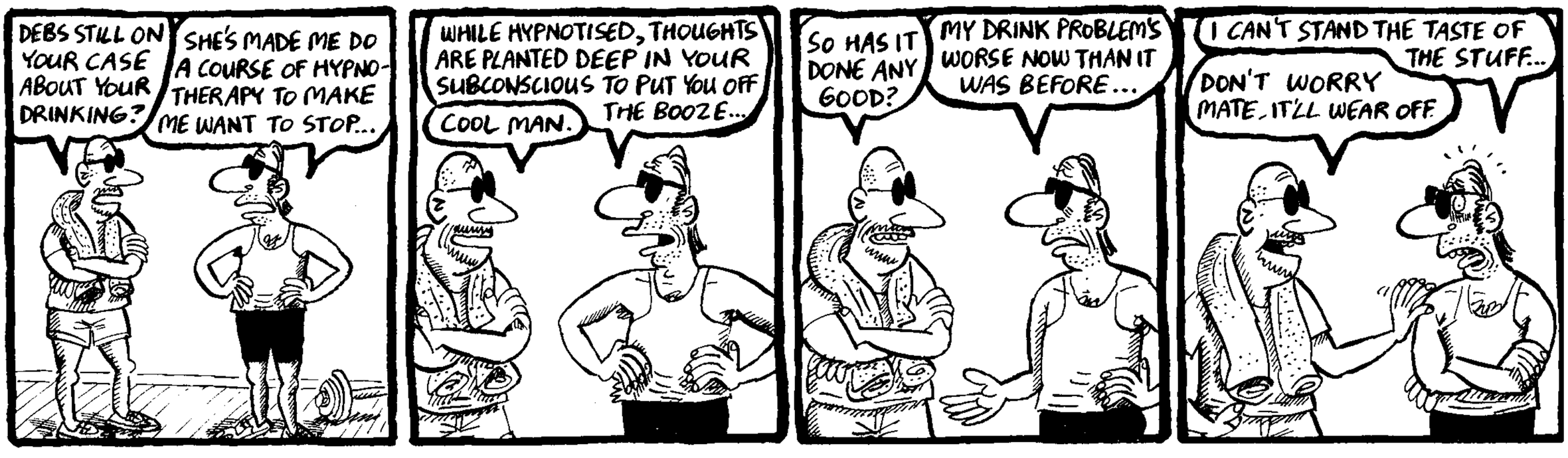
Yesterday, I got my extra boob. It looks fantastic. No peeping, fellas – or at least not 'til the deal with Sky TV and Nuts magazine is all signed and sealed (pictures including the kids, bless 'em, 50% extra per kid, please note: I'm a very private person, so anything extra's got to be paid for, fair dos).

Royal Ballet here I come! Next week, I'll be squeezing into my new tutu and going up to claim my new job from whoever the bloke is who's in charge. Let's hope he's not one of them! I'll tell him I'll be Juliet in Romeo and Juliet or I'm not being nothing, thanks very much. Never underestimate Katie Price. I know what sells, and if you've got Jordan with her 33% extra bosom at the Royal Ballet, well, you've got a fucking sell-out on your hands (and that's not all, lads!)

What next for Jordan? My corporate advisor has long-term plans for me to go for the complete transplant, so that I emerge from the clinic just as one gi-normous bosom. I certainly think that'll help me with my long-term ambition to become a senior member of the Royal Family, because they need something like that to keep them in the headlines, don't they.

Meanwhile, by the time you read this, I'll have signed the deal with Endemol to put their TV cameras in our luxury gold-plated bathroom for their new reality TV show "Peter and Jordan Go Toilet". We've already got Andrex to sponsor the luxury quilted toilet paper and Aqualoo of Swindon to sponsor each flush. I want it to show the fans that I'm not just the super-glamorous Jordan but also the very real, very human, very private Katie Price, though obviously that's extra.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN


DEBS STILL ON YOUR CASE ABOUT YOUR DRINKING?
SHE'S MADE ME DO A COURSE OF HYPNO-THERAPY TO MAKE ME WANT TO STOP...
WHILE HYPNOTISED, THOUGHTS ARE PLANTED DEEP IN YOUR SUBCONSCIOUS TO PUT YOU OFF THE BOOZE...
COOL MAN.
SO HAS IT DONE ANY GOOD?
MY DRINK PROBLEM'S WORSE NOW THAN IT WAS BEFORE...
I CAN'T STAND THE TASTE OF THE STUFF...
DON'T WORRY MATE, IT'LL WEAR OFF

Literary Review

Bores sincerely

Keeping Faith
Jodi Picoult
(Hodder, £12.99)

JODI PICOULT, author of a dozen decently received works and the winner of a New England Book Award back in her native land, was more or less unknown to English readers until the moment when, quite out of the blue, *My Sister's Keeper* got picked for *Richard and Judy*. Since that time messrs Hodder & Stoughton have been busily ransacking the backlist, and the result is that *Keeping Faith* – published in the US as far back as 1999, would you believe? – ploughs straight into the hardback fiction chart at Number One.

Though it may not be much of a novel, *Keeping Faith* is a pattern exposure of two of the most vigorous currents now at work in bookworld UK: on the one hand, the awesome power of the TV book group; on the other, the continuing allure of transatlantic schmaltz. No British writer could have written this 400-page slab of emotional breast-beating, which takes one of the classic situations of domestic drama (the fight over the child) and overlays it with a bumper dose of religion. No, we don't do that here, and the few novelists who do want to bring God into it – Susan Howatch, for example – generally confine themselves to modern versions of *Barchester*.

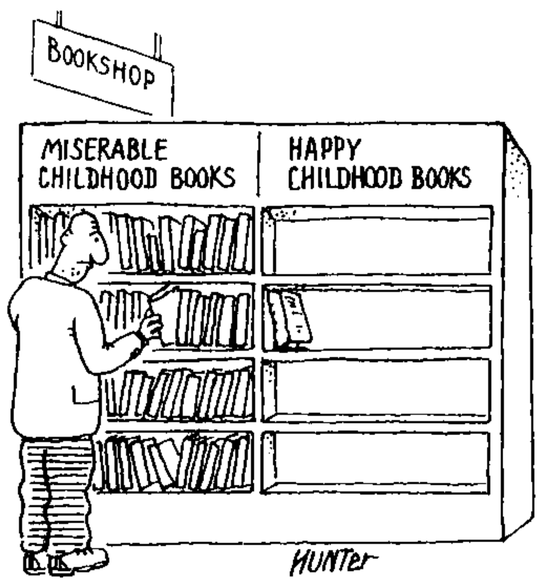
But back to New Hampshire, where Mariah White lives in notional out-of-town bliss with hunky consort Clive and seven-year-old daughter Faith. She designs dolls' houses – celebrity purchasers include Hillary Clinton – he sells fluorescent Exit signs. Everything is just dandy – certain hints about Mariah's flakey past notwithstanding – until the fateful day when mother and daughter skip ballet class and come back to find pop's floozie sashaying out of the shower. The source of Mariah's flakiness is then revealed in the story of her committal to an institution, in similar circumstances, around the time of Faith's conception.

As divorce proceedings are set in train, traumatised Faith starts hearing voices, talking to someone she describes as her "Guard" and reciting the names of Catholic saints who, given that her parents are Jewish-episcopalian, she can't possibly have heard of.

The shrinks are nonplussed, the representatives of organised religion and a skulking "tele-atheist" – a kind of Richard Dawkins for the masses named Ian Fletcher – hot in pursuit. Subsequently, in quick succession, Faith apparently brings her grandmother back from the dead, heals an AIDS-ravaged baby and displays stigmata on the palms of her hands. Mom, meanwhile, is developing rather a thing for Ian, while Dad, now tethered to moist-eyed Jessica, puts the whole thing down to his ex-wife's mental instability and begins a custody suit.

Prime-time hokum, of course, in which half-a-dozen of the most fashionable modern American neuroses are brushed down and given an airing. The target audience, by the way, can be glimpsed in the two-and-a-half-pages of cattleprod "Book Club Discussion Questions" ("Mariah makes miniature dream houses, and Colin makes Exit signs. Are there similar clues to other characters' personalities through their career choices?") thoughtfully appended to the final chapter.

Trying to work out why this kind of thing plays just as well in Chertsey, Surrey, as in Nowhere, Nebraska, one finds an explanation not in the working out of divine providence (something English readers find deeply uncomfortable) but in the customary talismanic vision of modern American life. Even the proceeds of designer dolls houses and Exit signs, it seems, are enough to fund a farm house and seven acres out in the country, not to mention all sorts of welcome add-ons about fulfilment and bonding with your ma. The yanks do this so much better than we do, largely because they really mean it. *Keeping Faith's* distinguishing mark, in fact, is its absolute sincerity.



Books & Bookmen

■ THE news that Time Warner's book division has been sold to Hachette Livre and that the French company is now eyeing up Simon & Schuster, raises some interesting questions about the business of publishing.

With the new acquisition, Hodder Headline and Orion, Hachette is now third in the UK book market, behind Penguin and Random House. Uniquely for a media company, it also owns 15 percent of an arms manufacturer -- the Franco-German firm EADS.

When Jean-Luc Lagardere died in 2003, there was speculation that his son and heir Arnaud Lagardere would sell the military side of the business and focus on the media, but this hasn't happened. Firstly, how do the liberals of UK publishing feel about the fact that their salvation has been at least partially funded by the sale of WMDs? Also, what's the outlook for critical books about the arms trade? Would such manuscripts be returned unread, lest they upset their new paymasters?

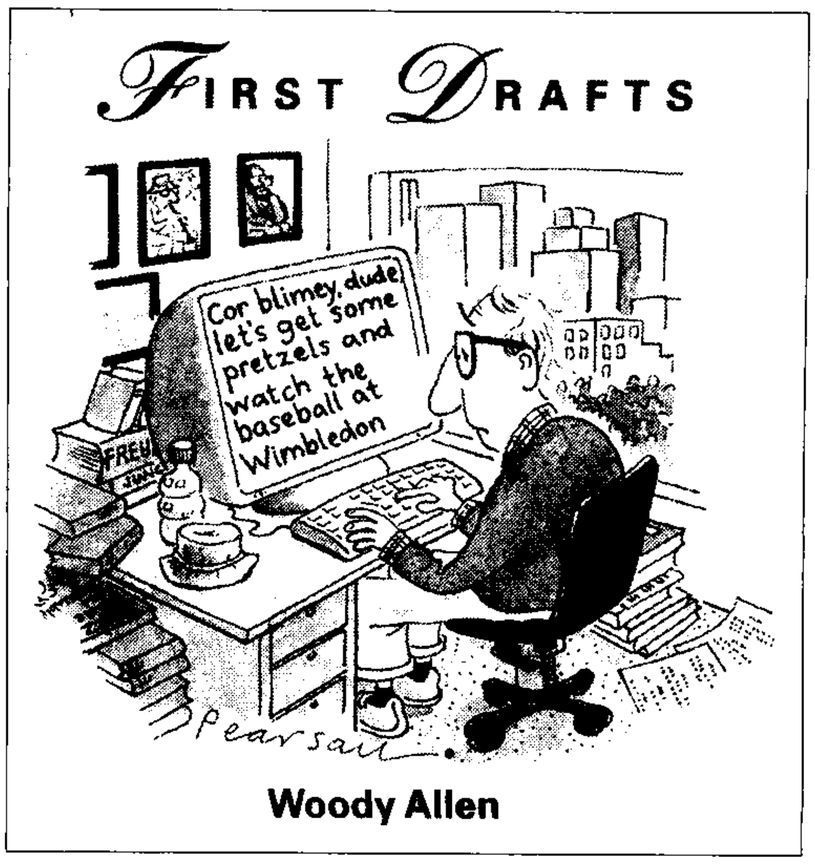
■ CHARING Cross Road's world-famous secondhand book stores are under threat from a 30-percent rent hike from their landlords.

The freehold on the 14 shops under the "Sandringham" flats, most of which are currently still booksellers, used to be owned by the Greater London Council but was sold to the Soho Housing Association (SHA) charity in 1989, along with the 157 flats. One of the shops is currently up for its five-year rent review and the owners were appalled by how much was being asked.

Shop rents are negotiated via an agent, EA Shaw (whose boards can be seen on many an empty small shop front around central London). SHA chief executive Chris Best said the 30 percent rise was "not astronomic" and that the housing association wanted to keep the traditional quality bookshops.

With many secondhand booksellers doing a lot of their business online, whopping rent rises are likely to drive them off even one of the most famously bookish high streets. While shop rents in central London have certainly rocketed, the Salisbury Estate which owns nearby Cecil Court, a small street lined with bookshops just off Charing Cross Road, has recently agreed a far more reasonable 6.45 percent increase.

'Bookworm'



Woody Allen

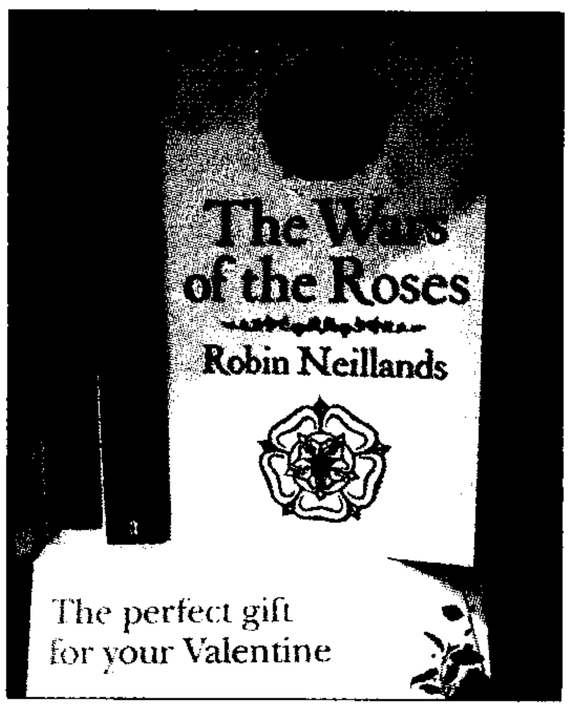
LIBRARY NEWS

■ IT CAN be risky for a public library service to score four stars (top marks) from the Audit Commission.

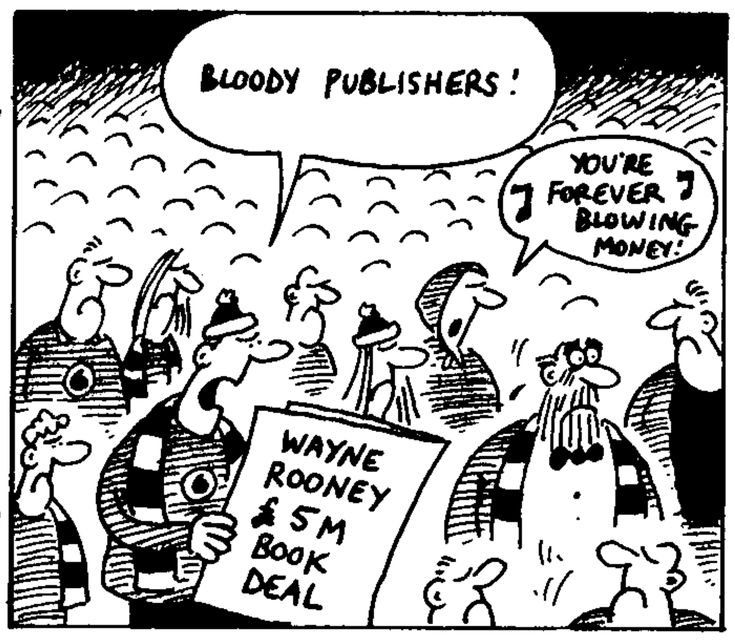
Cumbria County Council celebrated just such a score in December, thanks to the high number of borrowers in the county. And as the council's cabinet spokesman for culture, Roger Bingham, said: "I would encourage anyone who hasn't visited one of Cumbria's libraries for a while to do so and see how much they have to offer."

But they'd better get a move on. Just two months later, the county council is planning to close 20 small branch libraries, while reducing its seven mobile library vans' visits to isolated parts of the county, since "limited facilities and opening hours" mean they are "generally under-used". A self-fulfilling prophecy if ever there was one.

I-SPY *Notting Hill, London*



Submitted by Tom Trinkle



IN THE BACK

DEFENCE PRIVATISATION

Shriti politici

JAMES SASSOON is not the only ex-Warburg banker linked to the QinetiQ privatisation (see last *Eye*). Gordon Brown's top adviser and former Warburg's banker Shriti Vadera (pictured) has also been closely involved.

Vadera riled many because she was reportedly behind the decision not to offer QinetiQ shares to the general public. But there are other reasons to worry about her involvement. The privatisation marks a truly massive windfall for the Carlyle group, which paid £42m for a stake in the privatised high tech defence firm that is now worth £341m. UBS Warburg, Vadera and Sassoon's former employer, earned millions of course by advising the Ministry of Defence on the sale.

Vadera was involved in another disastrous PPP as one of the government's lead negotiators on the tube privatisation. Her job was to overrule Bob Kiley, London mayor Ken Livingstone's adviser, when he argued that there should be public control of safety and maintenance. UBS Warburg later made fees working on bonds for one of the tube firms, Metronet.

While at Warburg Vadera, like Sassoon, was also it seems employed to advise on the Tories' inspired privatisation of British Rail. She reportedly worked on the valuation of BR rolling stock companies… companies that were grossly undervalued, allowing the firms that bought them to make massive windfall profits, just like Carlyle!

Brown turned to Vadera and Sassoon ostensibly to bring some banking "discipline" into the Treasury. But this discipline now looks more like plain old punishment for the public sector.

● MEANWHILE QinetiQ has wasted no time acquiring that essential skill for any defence firm: schmoozing.

The firm, whose directors stand to make tens of millions from the sale, will increasingly need to compete for the Ministry of Defence work that makes up the bulk of its income – and is already part of a consortium looking for a slice of the £19bn Defence Training Review PPP deal. That calls for some serious networking – and where better to start than at next month's 5th Annual PPP/PFI Global Defence Conference in the sumptuous surroundings of the Sofitel Bercy hotel in Paris?

Almost anybody who's anybody in defence PFI will be there, including the MoD's director general of procurement and several other top officials, who will doubtless appreciate QinetiQ's generous sponsorship of the event. Also backing the shindig are PricewaterhouseCoopers (tens of millions from acting as government consultants on defence PFI deals) and Simmons and Simmons (millions as legal advisers and billed to speak on the "bankability" of complex PFI projects).

At the end of the first day guests will have "the very best opportunity to network with your peers across the Defence PPP value chain in the relaxed yet lively surroundings", courtesy of a drinks reception paid for by French company Thales, which runs several defence PFIs and last year won a £13bn jet refuelling PFI deal as part of the AirTanker consortium. Trebles all round!

PS: The In the Back team would be grateful for a telephone call on 020 7437 4017 from "the horse's mouth".

HEALTH PRIVATISATION

Hewitt pudding

THE unpopular and expensive Birmingham hospitals private finance initiative, one of the biggest health PFIs in Britain, is under increased threat thanks to Health Secretary Patricia Hewitt's latest Big Idea.

Hewitt's "choice" agenda means hospitals have to compete with each other to carry out operations, rather than have guaranteed block budgets. In the process, private companies will sell surgery to the NHS. But this means that hospital PFIs will lose the guaranteed cash flow they expect to pass on to their private consortia – in the case of Birmingham for the next forty years! Thus this bloated PFI, whose consortium comprises Balfour Beatty, Royal Bank of Scotland and HSBC, is now stuck in the Department of Health while beancounters try to puzzle out whether it is affordable.

The price has ballooned from £200m to £590m; and minutes from a board meeting of Monitor, the regulator for foundation trusts, already show that the figures don't add up. There is, however, no "plan B" for Birmingham should the PFI flounder. The trust has already spent £30m on car parks and roads for the new hospital.

Cash injection

DOCTORS, nurses and other staff who work in the new frontline practices to be run by the US health giant UnitedHealth Europe, as it muscles in on Britain's lucrative £80bn health market, won't be eligible for the same level of pension they would have received in the NHS.

This will no doubt give UnitedHealth a big financial advantage in preparing bids to win the new GP contracts – like its recent successes in Derbyshire (see last *Eye*). But it might also make working for UnitedHealth less attractive to good doctors and nurses.

Since winning the two contracts for GP services in Cresswell and central Derby, it has emerged that United (president: Simon Stevens, Tony Blair's former health adviser) already had contracts with 15 of the 19 primary care trusts in the area to rank their patients by level of "risk", in order to determine their health needs and potential costs. United has been accused of using confidential patient data it received as part of these contracts to secure its GP bids – a claim it denies.

As the last *Eye* reported, local patients and a parish council in Derby have launched a legal challenge to UnitedHealth. Although the contracts are tiny by the standards of a $28bn (£16bn) corporation, it seems United will fight for them all the way. The government white paper introduces practice-based commissioning – or rather a return to fundholding under which the bulk of the NHS purchasing power will be handed to GP practices (like the Tories' old GP fundholders) to commission both hospital and primary care. The more GP premises United manages to buy, the bigger the purchasing budget it controls and the bigger its profits.

RESEARCH PRIVATISATION

Forensic test

POLICE and scientists were delighted with the Home Office's decision a year ago not to sell off the publicly-owned Forensic Science Service (FSS). The last thing they wanted was a service driven by profit at the expense of doing the right forensic work.

Now, however, it has emerged that even under public ownership the FSS is profit-driven. A recent parliamentary question from Lib Dem MP Adrian Sanders asking for the FSS's targets revealed at number 1 the requirement to achieve a "risk adjusted return on capital (ROCE)" of 15 percent and, at number 2, a "real reduction in charges versus average earnings index" of 75 percent.

The only targets that crime specialists, as opposed to investment bankers, might understand relate to the time taken to deal with cases; none address anything so mundane as providing decent forensic science.

With the main measures of performance aimed at maximising profits, the cancelled privatisation can't be far off. As reported in *Eye* 1147, the Home Office's science strategy talks about giving the FSS the "opportunity to succeed in its own right before moving to a public private partnership (PPP)". Coincidentally, a return of 15 percent on investments is the kind of generous return PPP backers look for.

POLICE CORRUPTION

Untouchables out of reach

Nick Hardwick is the boss of the Independent Police Complaints Commission and he faces mounting concern over complaints of serious corruption inside, er Scotland Yard's anti-corruption squad.

In June 2005, Detective Constable Nabeel Akhtar made a serious complaint to the IPCC soon after his conviction for assaulting a taxi driver in south London was overturned. Judge John Bull had said he was "wholly unable to accept" the eyewitness evidence of no fewer than five surveillance officers from the Yard's anti-corruption squad, known as the 'Untouchables'.

Three of the anti-corruption officers had given evidence using the pseudonyms Patricia Hall, Peter Rich and Giles Barnes. Detective sergeants Patrick Delaney and Daniel Dwyer used their real names. But Judge Bull appeared persuaded by defence submissions that Akhtar had been "fitted up" with the road rage charge because an on-going surveillance operation – estimated cost: £250,000 – produced no evidence of suspected drug corruption.

The Black Police Association likened his case to that of Superintendent Ali Desai, (*Eyes passim*) whose ordeal was just ending as Akhtar's began.

Judge Bull demanded that Met Commissioner Sir Ian Blair be passed his excoriating judgment. But nobody at the Met notified the IPCC, despite a clear "duty" to do so, and none of the officers was suspended. The IPCC was only brought in when Akhtar himself complained about the tainted anti-corruption officers, some of whom were preparing to give evidence in other corruption trials – one involving relatives of a well-known premiership footballer.

The watchdog took two months to reply to Akhtar; and despite its stated aim to independently investigate all "serious allegations" involving "corruption" and "perverting the course of justice", it handed the inquiry to Northamptonshire Police.

Three months later a statement was finally taken from Akhtar, who by now was back at work. He added the names of 10 other anti-corruption officers to the complaint, including Detective Chief Superintendent Maxine de Brunner, who had authorised the surveillance operation and then taken over the legal case against Akhtar. His statement pointed out that before she was promoted to the Untouchables, de Brunner had been accused during the 2002 trial of royal butler Paul Burrell of "grossly misleading" the Prince of Wales.

It's understood the IPCC has still not formally notified any of the anti-corruption officers that they are under investigation. The rules are clear that this should be done quickly. The accused officers could now use the eight-month delay as an abuse of process argument to avoid possible prosecution.

The anti-corruption and anti-terrorist squads are the most powerful in Scotland Yard; and many senior Untouchables were recruited into the war on terror. It was, of course, both these departments that Ian Blair allowed to control the crucial first few days of the inquiry into the shooting of Jean Charles Menezes while the IPCC was shut out.

MISCARRIAGES OF JUSTICE

Call the Samaritans

WHO WOULD be a Good Samaritan? In 1999 Shaun Booker went to the aid of a man lying seriously injured on the ground outside a club. Seeing he was bleeding profusely from the head and struggling to breathe, Mr Booker attempted to put him in the recovery position only later to find himself serving a jail sentence for the man's manslaughter.

Last week appeal court judges cleared him of the pub-brawl killing, without offering any explanation for the serious injustice that had caused him to serve 21 months for a crime he had always denied.

Exonerating Mr Booker, now 36, the judges said only that new evidence had come to light which indicated he was not the perpetrator of the fatal assault on 57-year-old labourer Michael Marples, and that he had indeed, as he told police at the time, gone to Mr Marples' aid.

But Lord Justice Keene said the court could not reveal what the new material was because the Crown had claimed that old friend of court secrecy, "public interest immunity", saying it would cause serious damage to the public interest if disclosed. "We acknowledge this must be less than satisfactory for Mr Booker, but it is a course we are bound to take in the public interest," the judge said.

"Less than satisfactory" is a bit of an understatement for never being allowed to know how a man of previous good character ended up being convicted of killing man whose life he was trying to save. But the Crown's acknowledgment of the injustice raises serious questions about the original trial in 2002.

Mr Booker was convicted largely as a result of scientific evidence surrounding the many blood spatters on his clothing – not unlike the case of headteacher Sion Jenkins. The prosecution claimed the spatters could only have come as a result of Mr Booker punching the victim at least twice – once to make him bleed, a second time to cause the spattering effect.

As Mr Booker's defence scientists claimed at the time, this was a tricky point to prove. First because Mr Marples' injuries – one to his face and the other fatal one to the back of his head – were consistent with only one heavy punch causing him to fall, fracturing his skull on the ground.

In fact the initial report prepared by Prof Christopher Milroy, Home Office pathologist, recorded evidence of only one punch; a second report later said he could not rule out more than one punch. In addition, because the blood spatters on Mr Booker were found both on his shirt and around his knee, they were more consistent with his account that the victim was coughing up blood as he knelt down to place him in the recovery position.

To overcome the "problem" of most of the blood spatters being in the knee region and not where one would expect them if they had been caused by a punch, the Crown's forensic scientist, Gillian Leek, suggested several scenarios. They included the possibility that Mr Booker had, after flooring Mr Marples with one punch, raised him to hit him again – except that would have meant blood dripping downwards and there were no such drips; another scenario was that Mr Marples had raised himself up, but that presented the same problem and in any event Mr Marples had suffered a severe head fracture and was unlikely to have been able to lift himself up. A third possibility was that Mr Booker had put Mr Marples in the recovery position to disguise the cause of the original bloodstains on his clothing.

Defence experts at the time described her evidence as "dangerous" and "opinion" rather than being based on the diagnostic shape, size and staining of the blood, which they concluded was exhaled blood.

There is another troubling aspect to Mr Booker's wrongful conviction. Before the trial in 2002, the prosecution had offered a plea bargain. The Crown offered to accept a guilty plea to manslaughter based on the acceptance that there was only one punch – even though its case depended entirely upon having to prove that there had to have been more than one blow. Mr Booker, as an innocent man, declined the offer and faced trial for murder. In fact the jury found him guilty of the lesser offence of manslaughter.

Lawyers for Mr Booker had urged that he be given at least some indication of why he was wrongfully convicted, but although the judges were careful to point out that it was not because of any impropriety on the part of any of the prosecution witnesses, they would not be drawn further. "The Crown made it clear they would have abandoned the case against Mr Booker if the new evidence had been available. This conviction cannot stand, in light of the new material. It goes without saying there has been a serious miscarriage of justice, one can only profoundly regret that it has happened," said lord justice Keene. Indeed. Not only was Mr Booker wrongly incarcerated, but the real killer is still at large.

CON-SULTANTS

Jobs for the Booz

THE latest passenger aboard the gravy train running between Whitehall and the consultancy industry is Lord Andrew Turnbull, until last year Cabinet Secretary and head of the civil service, who has become a senior adviser to American firm Booz Allen Hamilton.

Turnbull (aptly named perhaps for someone becoming a management consultant) was instrumental in Tony Blair's second term attempts to shake up Whitehall, setting up the civil service reform programme that has seen government departments, not least No 10 and the Cabinet Office, employ a host of consultants. He also championed the "delivery" agenda under which the management consultancies' income from the taxpayer has increased to more than £2bn a year.

In a valedictory speech last summer Turnbull surveyed the changes in the civil service and concluded: "We no longer claim a monopoly over policy advice. Indeed we welcome the fact that we are much more open to ideas from think tanks, consultancies, governments abroad, special advisers and frontline practitioners." He was too polite to mention the exorbitant fees charged by the "consultancies", now handily supplementing his pension.

Booz Allen Hamilton has won tens of millions of pounds from government in recent years, enabling Turnbull to laud his new employer's "strong track record of helping private and public sector organisations undertake radical transformation". Thanks, in no small part, to his own reforms…

Healthy profits

EARLY surveys on the introduction of patient choice in the NHS from 1 January might show that most people aren't aware of it, still less want it. But it's all good news for the management consultants.

The objective of "creating a patient led NHS" has been divided into "workstreams", with consultants appointed to the crucial ones of "practice-based commissioning" (PA Consulting), "contracting and procurement" (PricewaterhouseCoopers) and "creating a commissioning market" (McKinsey).

McKinsey's remit will particularly alarm anyone familiar with the disastrous "commissioning" reforms it brought into the BBC under Director-General John Birt. A similar sort of outcome might not do much for the NHS; but it will provide plenty more work for McKinsey, which already acts as consultant to many of the primary care trusts which, as the main "commissioners" of healthcare, will be able turn to them again to explain (for an appropriate fee) how it all works.

PwC, meanwhile, is reaping the benefit of taking back the man it seconded to head the Department of Health's strategy unit, Simon Leary. He's now cashing in on his strategies as the partner responsible for the firm's work on procurement, acting as a consultant to the… Department of Health.

Hired he£p

PROVING once again that no government reorganisation is possible without enlisting McKinsey, the consultants were also brought in as the Inland Revenue and Customs merged last year.

Back in July HMRC chairman David Varney told the *Financial Times* that the job was being done mainly in-house with just some "process re-engineering work" (whatever that is) farmed out to McKinsey. But the *Eye* has established that McKinsey's remit included the more fundamental tasks of "developing and implementing the new organizational model" and "designing and setting up key management processes and governance structures". HMRC reconciled the apparent contradiction by explaining that "McKinsey provided us with valuable consultancy services… however, the implementation and design was indeed carried out largely in-house".

If the consultants really were relatively peripheral, what justified their £5.3m bill (equivalent to 25 full-time consultants on £1,000 a day *each* for the nine-month contract)? HMRC wouldn't answer that one.

Between them, the government and the consultants have devised a truly McKinseyian arrangement of "customer units", "operations", "product/processes groups" and "corporate functions" which several HMRC staff describe as totally incomprehensible.

EMPLOYMENT LAW

Little Britain

WORKERS posted abroad or who spend their time travelling are entitled to the same employment rights as those working on the UK mainland, the House of Lords ruled in the case of the five sacked Cathay Pacific pilots last week.

The appeal court had already agreed that the pilots should have access to employment tribunals (*Eye* 1134), but their employer, Veta Ltd (a subsidiary of Hong Kong's Cathay, based at Heathrow for "economic reasons"), took the case to the Lords, insisting its workers were not covered by British employment protection laws.

"Unless one regards airline pilots as the Flying Dutchmen of labour law, condemned to fly without any jurisdiction in which they can seek redress," said Lord Hoffman, "I think there is no sensible alternative to asking where they are based."

The case was heard alongside two others involving workers posted abroad by British employers. One was a British civilian youth worker posted to a British base in Germany by the Ministry of Defence. When he claimed unfair dismissal, the MoD claimed he couldn't take it to employment tribunal under British law.

The other was an employee of outsourcing giant Serco, posted to the RAF base on Ascension Island as a security supervisor under Serco's contract to service the base. After he quit, claiming constructive dismissal, his employer also claimed that he did not come under the jurisdiction of UK employment law.

Lord Hoffman ruled that where an employee was doing work abroad for a business conducted in Britain, or where they were in a "British enclave" such as a military base, they should be covered by the law.

In the City

THE threatened £13bn takeover battle for the Luxembourg-based Arcelor steel giant by Indian billionaire and Labour donor Lakshmi Mittal has already set political nerves jangling in France and Spain, as well as in the EU's smallest but richest member.

But it could produce unwelcome developments also for Mittal's avid supporter, the Dear Leader, should the bid battle get down and dirty, as is more than possible, with both sides sounding out corporate private eyes. Perhaps in Arcelor's case to dig the dirt on how Mittal has expanded his operations in some of the world's most notoriously corrupt countries.

Mittal has been a very generous donor to "new" Labour and in return Tony Blair and his government have rushed to back Mittal's foreign expansion plans – particularly in Romania, as well as in obtaining loans from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development for Romania and Kazakhstan. No doubt similar supportive lobbying can be expected if necessary to fend off Arcelor's political allies. So even the most far-fetched allegations of improper behavior by Mittal associates, never mind accusations of influence buying or corruption, would be a little embarrassing.

After all, Mittal has made it clear he wants nothing for even his most recent and biggest donation to Labour – a mere £2m after last year's election. Not even presumably an honorary peerage like British Asian donors who have given far less.

However, the Romanian intervention – Tony Blair personally wrote to the Romanian prime minister in July 2001 backing Mittal's bid for the state-owned Sidex plant against a French rival (now part of Arcelor), two months after Mittal donated £125,000 to Labour – may be about to come back to bite Blair a second time.

The first time was in 2002 when the letter became public and it was pointed out that, far from backing Britain, in backing Mittal in Romania Blair was in fact backing an offshore company based in that part of Britain that will forever be, er, the Netherlands Antilles in the Caribbean!

Now the man Blair wrote to so enthusiastically – the Romanian prime minister from 2001 to 2004, Adrian Nastase, who was so impressed that within days he agreed that Sidex should go to Mittal – is experiencing a little local difficulty. Earlier this month Nastase was indicted for corruption over land obtained in 1998 at far below market price from a businessman facing fraud charges and since jailed. He also faces further investigation into the source of $350,000 and three apartments which, he claimed, had come from an apparently impoverished aunt who died last year.

Needless to say Mittal was not involved in these matters and there is no evidence of any involvement by Mittal or its associates in corrupt payments in Romania, which is under great pressure from the EU to clean up its act if it is to join next year. A possibility not improved by the local parliament rejecting an anti-corruption law.

But such close relations with politicians – Mittal prides himself on not confronting the governments of those countries in which he operates – can lead to what can be unfortunate misunderstandings. Especially in countries where brown envelope corruption rather than cash for titles and jobs is the norm.

A quick scan of the Mittal Steel universe reveals it has acquired operations over the years in such pillars of probity as Indonesia, Mexico, Poland and most recently Ukraine, as well as Romania and Kazakhstan.

Back in 2002 it was alleged that $100m had been paid by Mittal companies to Patokh Chodiev and his associates for their assistance in buying the state-owned Karmet steel plant in Kazakhstan in 1995. The Mittal camp insisted these payments were not commissions (never mind bribes) but were for ore supplies.

Chodiev and his millionaire associates Alidjan Ibragimov and Alexander Mashkevich are close to the Kazakh president Nursultan Nazarbayev. They have been under investigation in Belgium and Switzerland for alleged money-laundering linked to commissions paid on a pipeline deal by the Belgian company, Tractebel. They deny such charges.

Mittal was inadvertently drawn into the Belgian inquiry when Scotland Yard was asked to assist in making inquiries about the Chodiev group's activities and bank accounts in Britain. Mittal's lawyers asked the Home Office to obtain information about the scope and nature of the investigation from the Belgian authorities. The Belgians had requested banking information on the Kazakh trio as part of their money-laundering inquiry. The Belgian inquiry eventually petered out, with no charges being brought.

Nazarbayev himself features centrally in the US bribery prosecution of American James Giffen, due to go to trial later this year in New York state, over bribes paid by international oil companies. Giffen was the self-admitted Nazarbayev "bagman". Chodiev and his associates Ibragimov and Mashkevich, it is alleged, played a similar role in the metals business. The Giffen trial is expected to be embarrassing for Nazarbayev and many of those who did business with the Kazakh kleptocracy.

But as a man who always boasts of maintaining the highest business standards, Lakshmi Mittal undoubtedly has nothing to fear from a close examination of his dealings in faraway places with strange sounding names. Something with which his friends in "new" Labour and the Dear Leader will wholeheartedly agree.

CHELSEA not only enjoys the generous support of Roman Abramovich (£440m by June 2005 and by now probably well over the £500m mark.) The latest Chelsea FC accounts show that its suppliers too are required to be generous.

They were providing the equivalent of 50 days' credit at the year-end compared with the more normal terms of 30 days for most companies and encouraged as good practice. Rivals Arsenal's creditors were kept waiting on average 25 days in 2005 and even the phoney pharaoh Mohamed Fayed's Fulham paid after 39 days in 2004. But then the Premiership winners' 2005 operating expenses well exceeded even total revenue – £162m plays £146m. So cash flow management is all important, even with the Abramovich cheque book available.

Elsewhere on Planet Football it is interesting to note that, despite announcing his purchase of a 50 percent stake in struggling Portsmouth some six weeks ago, young master Alexandre Gaydamak has yet to acquire any shares in the club. His position instead appears to be secured by a 10 January deed and legal charge covering "all monies" advanced to the club – said to be up to £15m so far. Which may explain why Gaydamak junior has yet to join the Pompey board.

THE attempt by the liquidators for the Savings & Investment Bank to recover money from its joint biggest debtor, Kenneth Fincken, was even more pyrrhic than anticipated in *Eye* 1142. The sad truth is revealed in the final statement to the collapsed Manx bank's depositors from joint liquidators Michael Jordan and Tim Beer.

Between May 2000 and November 2005, no less than £480,000 in legal fees and costs, plus £869,000 in liquidators' fees and expenses, plus £224,000 in VAT, was spent largely in pursuit of Fincken who finally paid precisely £225,000 last July.

This compared with the £19m he and his dead partner Michael Morris borrowed from SIB before it crashed in 1982. Both men had earlier handed over assets worth £1m each in 1992 on the basis that was all they could afford. Even further legal and liquidators' fees had been expended in the three years before May 2000 in pursuit of suspected hidden Fincken assets.

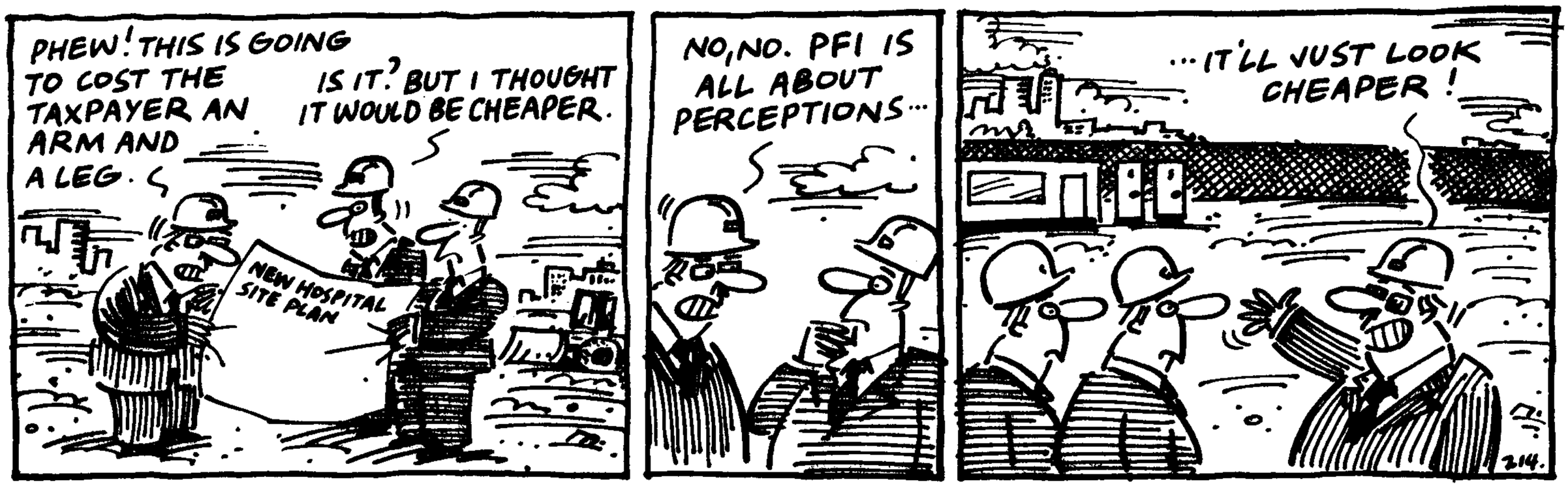
Not surprisingly there is nothing left for the SIB creditors after the lawyers and liquidators have taken their cut. Total receipts from the 23-year SIB liquidation £21.8m. Total expenses £11.8m, including £5.3m in liquidators' fees and expenses. Total paid back to depositors £10m. Go figure!

THOSE who consider that City Slickers Anil Bhoyrul (community service) and James Hipwell (six months, half suspended) got off lightly and that their *Mirror* followers such as Piers Morgan, Martin Cruddace (plus friends and relatives), Tina Weaver and three other *Mirror* employees should have been in the dock with them point to the different way in which such newspaper tip-and-sell insider-dealing scandals have been handled by the US authorities.

In several cases involving journalists or newspapers since the *Wall Street Journal*'s Foster Winans was convicted in 1985, the American approach is clear – go after the source of the inside information and all those who benefit, not just the insiders.

Winans was jailed for 18 months. His room-

THE DIRECTORS DREDGE & RIGG

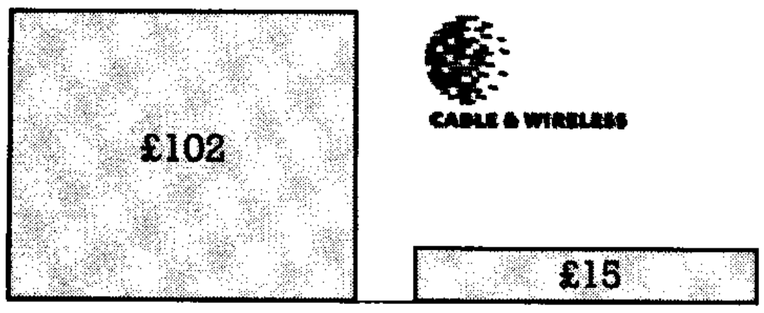

PHEW! THIS IS GOING TO COST THE TAXPAYER AN ARM AND A LEG.
IS IT? BUT I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE CHEAPER.
NEW HOSPITAL SITE PLAN
NO, NO. PFI IS ALL ABOUT PERCEPTIONS...
...IT'LL JUST LOOK CHEAPER!
214.

Stock Horror

by 'Bruin'

Commercial Wallies

What you'd have left from £100 invested 5 years ago in...



...the average UK share

...Cable & Wireless

mate messenger was given three years' probation. Two brokers who paid Winans for information were jailed for eight and six months. A lawyer died before he could be sentenced.

Also in 1985 the Securities & Exchange Commission brought a civil action against a printing company clerk and seven others who traded on inside information ahead of its publication by Value Line. They agreed to repay $157,000.

The SEC and federal prosecutors also brought five similar actions against those who traded ahead of tips in *Business Week*. These included brokers, as well as former *Business Week* broadcast editor Seymour Ruderman who was jailed for six months in 1989. Ten years later, prosecutors and the SEC nailed five brokers and the foreman at the plant printing *Business Week* for insider-trading on early copies of the magazine. They all pleaded guilty or were convicted.

But of course the City Slickers faced the Department of Timidity & Inaction, who found it too challenging to go after all those inside the *Mirror* who benefited from Bhoyrul and Hipwell's criminality, claiming all their frequent purchases were mere coincidence.

The Department Of You Can't Make It Up

THAILAND premier Thaksin Shinawatra, who at one time was said to want to buy the Liverpool soccer club, last month sold control of his Shin Corp telecoms to airlines conglomerate to the Singapore government for $1.9bn.

Just three days before the deal his British Virgin Islands company sold an 11 percent stake in Shin to the premier's son and daughter for a fraction of the price paid by Singapore. The entire $1.9bn will be tax-free. The name of the BVI company – Ample Rich Investments.

'Slicker'

Number crunchings

6 ■ Months James Hipwell will spend in prison for his part in City Slickers affair (three of them suspended), the only custodial sentence

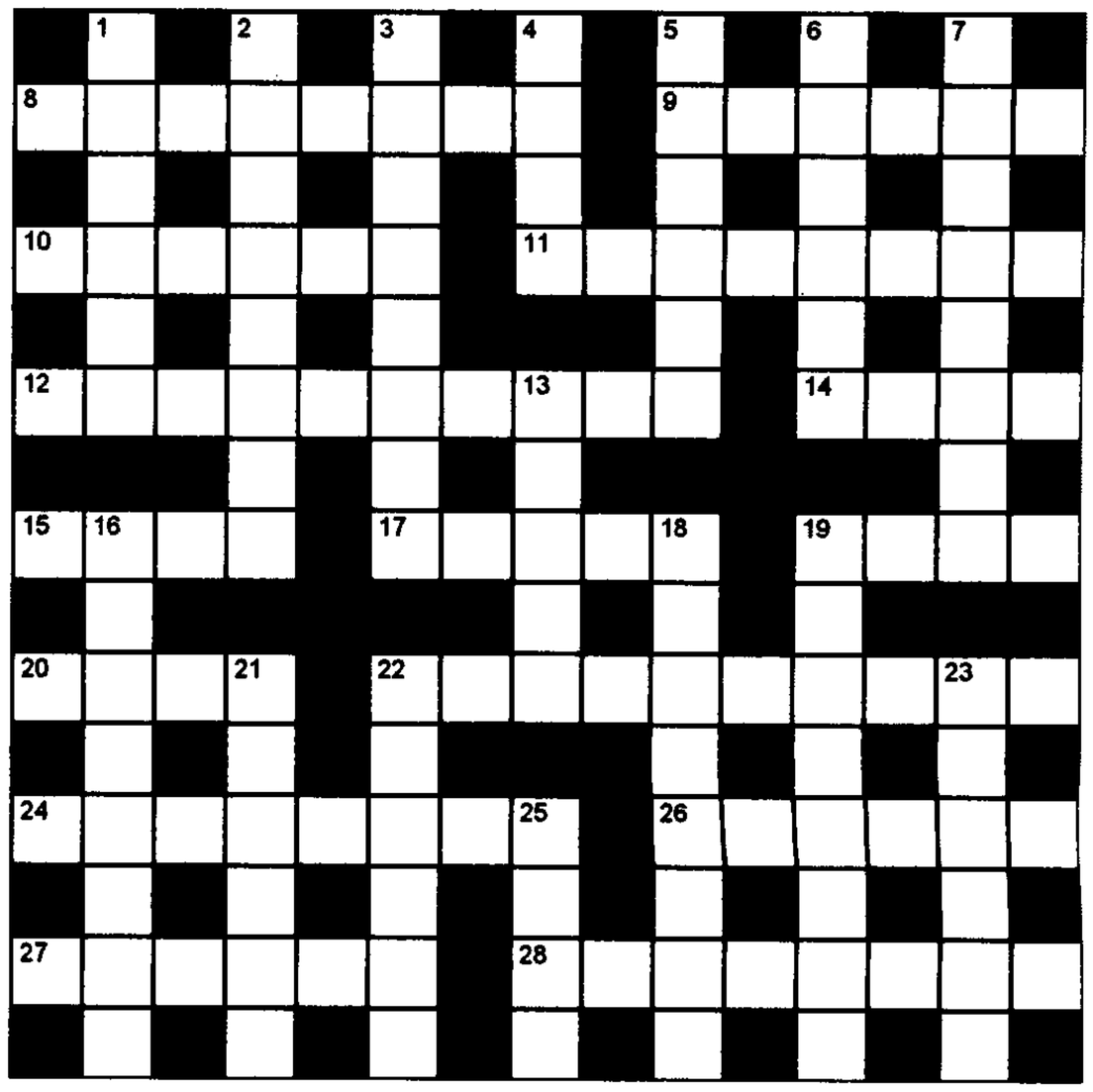
6 ■ Number of other staff at *Daily Mirror* who admit having bought shares tipped by City Slickers (plus three of their relatives), all by coincidence

EYE CROSSWORD 307

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 24 February 2006

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



ACROSS

8 Buy a copy of e.g. *John Major: the Autobiography*? Don't be such a nerd! (3,1,4)
9 Some tit's big ugly organ (6)
10 Deployed by strong-arm types prepared to do it with male or female on spec, possibly (6)
11 One who wipes tart (8)
12 Be very scared of quiet sex with decent people (4,6)
14/26 Pissed off, pisspoor Duran Duran – i.e. without any ultimate no.1s (3,1,6)
15 That leaves Maggie an ageing sex symbol (4)
17 Bring back Conservative Iain's first snooze alarm (5)
19 Rebekah possibly doing a U-turn with her pointless rag exposed (4)
20 Member's opening device (4)
22 OBN candidate gets to be repellent penetrating a dog (10)
24 Grope out of place around Kylie's butt (3,1,4)
26 See 14ac.
27 Stones want half a smacker for crafty personal transport (3,3)
28 One kept by the old queen's pussy at one time perhaps (8)

DOWN

1 Model, if she jiggled around, would be a sex object? (6)
2 Ena's over being grabbed by one who rogers tiger (3-5)
3 Perhaps a jungle clearing broadcast by Peel (8)
4 Our old Queen possibly seen in live sex show openings (4)
5 Pants and takes the line of least resistance? (6)
6 Sexy shag that might get your cucumber really big (6)
7 Made to go topless, like a couple of Henry's mates (8)
13 City gutted over backbencher Brown, not King, the scoffer (5)
16 Electorate embraces Gordon at first – unpleasant after-effect! (8)
18 He's no longer equipped to reach the top as a singer (8)
19 Such as 'Becks' can handle (8)
21 Underwear, sexy without once being shameless (6)
22 In Thatcher I envisage a soul mate for Tony (6)
23 Votes for English over Celts, maybe (6)
25 Leader from *Liverpool Echo*: "Not love but lust" (4)

Crossword 306 winner: DAVE MILLS

ACROSS: 9 Hot potato 10 Cairo 11/12 Charles Kennedy 13 Basics 14 Boy scout 17/21 Ragbag 19 Swansea 22 Sunshade 24 Assent 27 Cash cow 28 Samurai 30 Steel 31 Rigoletto.

DOWN: 1 Chic 2 Straps 3 Bollocks 4 Fatso 5 Workhouse 6 Scenes 7 Time bomb 8 Tony 13 Boris 15 Tight 16 Handiwork 18 Gangster 20 Assembly 23 Heckle 25 Errata 26 V-sign 27 Cast 29 Iron.

YOBETTES
HUSBAND
Mum, I got drunk in Blackpool and had a tattoo done
Groan, let's see
That's not too bad I suppose
Er, there's a bit more

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OM SAI RAM

A fitting end to the ill-fitting British suit

A suitable man to spark a men's clothing revolution

Consider this proposition. Would you rather pay the same sum for a single, off the-peg, chain store suit cut by a computer and sold to you by a spotty boy who thinks side vents are to be found on a Lambretta scooter, or for two bespoke, custom cut, hand-stitched suits, measured and sold to you by a man for whom suits are a lifetime's passion?

The British clothing chain store has a lot to fear from ***Mr. Raja M Daswani*** of Kowloon. If there were a global ambassador for men's suiting, Mr Daswani, who owns and runs Hong Kong's biggest tailoring business, would be that man. He and his family team measure and make hundreds of suits a week for discerning clients across the world.

Indeed, so successful is ***Mr. Daswani***, that – a little unnervingly as he is measuring you up – he freely admits he doesn't really need to work any more: 'My team is as experienced as I am. But I just love men's suits and I wouldn't feel right sitting at home. It's not a business. It's a mission.

'I love seeing customers walk in a really bad suit that cost them a fortune and walk out in one of our suits that's perfect in every way, made with a good heart in a superior fabric for a half or a quarter as much.'

The price of a Daswani shirt and suit are astonishing. We are talking from £19 (£25 including tax and duty) for a custom shirt and £129 (£169 including tax and duty) for a fully lined, made-to measure suit in a lightweight wool or linen, to £250 (£325 including tax and duty) for a 100 per cent wool, entirely hand finished suit in a British cloth, with every refinement from handmade button holes to knee lining. Even the most expensive suit, made in deluxe superfine wool for £1,500 (£1,950 including tax and duty), costs a third less than it would on **Savile Row**.

Raja Daswani may be based in Hong Kong, but his sartorial mission to the badly dressed and overpaying British customer brings him to the UK as often as once a month. He and his team take over hotel suites in major cities, so British customers can make an appointment and get the full Kowloon Monty.

Measurements and digital photos are taken here and emailed to Hong Kong. Often, your suit will be started on by a tailor 6,000 miles away before you've even left the hotel. You can have it couriered within a week or so, or wait for a second fitting when the Raja team hits your town again a few weeks later.

It now remains to see whether the Raja revolution, with its inspired mix of artistic flair, entrepreneurial genius and digital technology, will see the end of the off-the-peg British chain store suit. On price alone, it's a sartorial solution that will even please the Suits in accounts.

Business hours 10am - 8pm
(by appointment only)
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Tel: 0163 557 4233
Website: www.raja-fashions.com

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Mar 6–8	Tel: 0207-265-6000
London	Four Seasons Canary Wharf
Mar 9–10	Tel: 0207-510-1999
London	Hilton Paddington Hotel
Mar 11–14	Tel: 0207-850-0500
Leeds	Leeds City Hilton
Mar 1–2	Tel: 0113-244-2000
Manchester	Renaissance Manchester
Mar 3–4	Tel: 0161-835-2555
Birmingham	Hyatt Regency Birmingham
Mar 5–6	Tel: 0121-643-1234
Bristol	Bristol Marriott Hotel
Mar 7–8	Tel: 0117-929-4281
Glasgow	Hilton Glasgow
Mar 10–11	Tel: 0141-204-5555
Newcastle	Hilton Newcastle Gateshead
Mar 12–13	Tel: 0191-490-9700
Edinburgh	George Inter Continental
Mar 14–15	Tel: 01312-251-251
Oxford	Old Bank Hotel
Mar 15–16	Tel: 01865-799-599
Aberdeen	Thistle Aberdeen Caledonian
Mar 16–17	Tel: 01224-640-233
Reading	Holiday Inn Reading-South
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Southampton	Holiday Inn Hl Southampton
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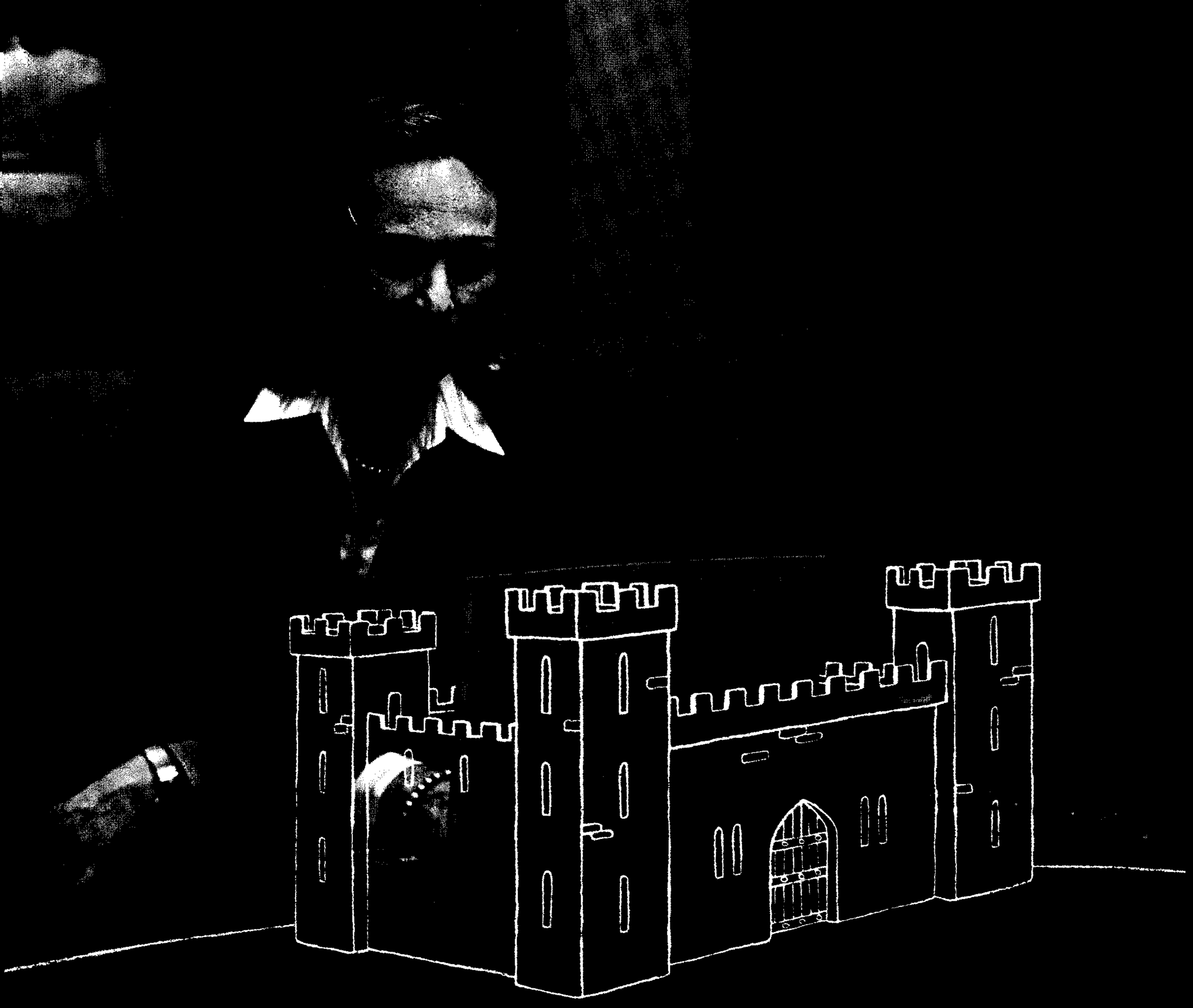

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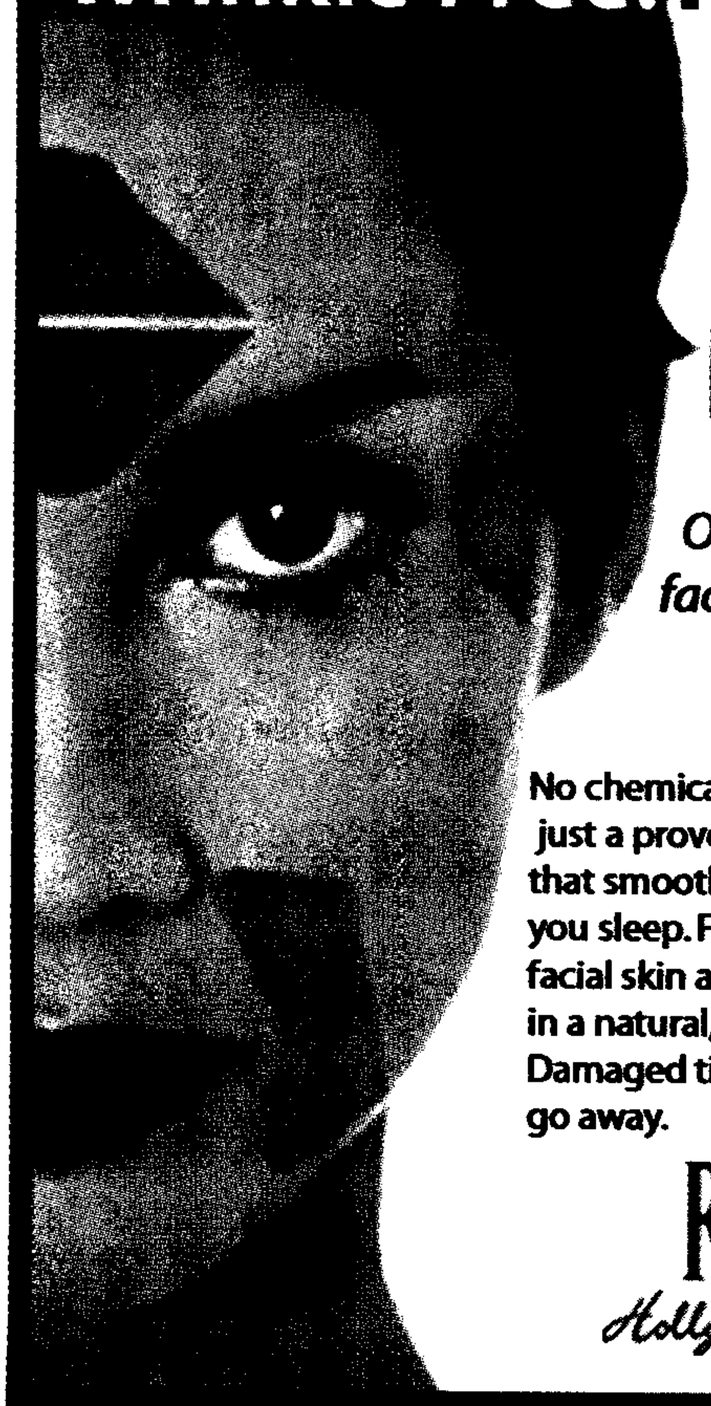

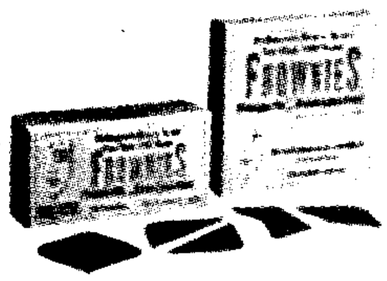

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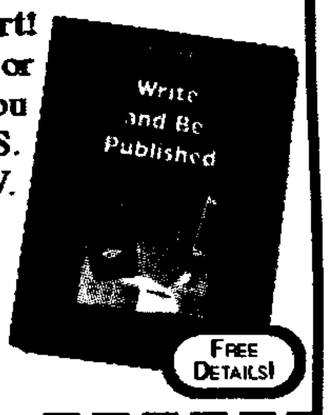

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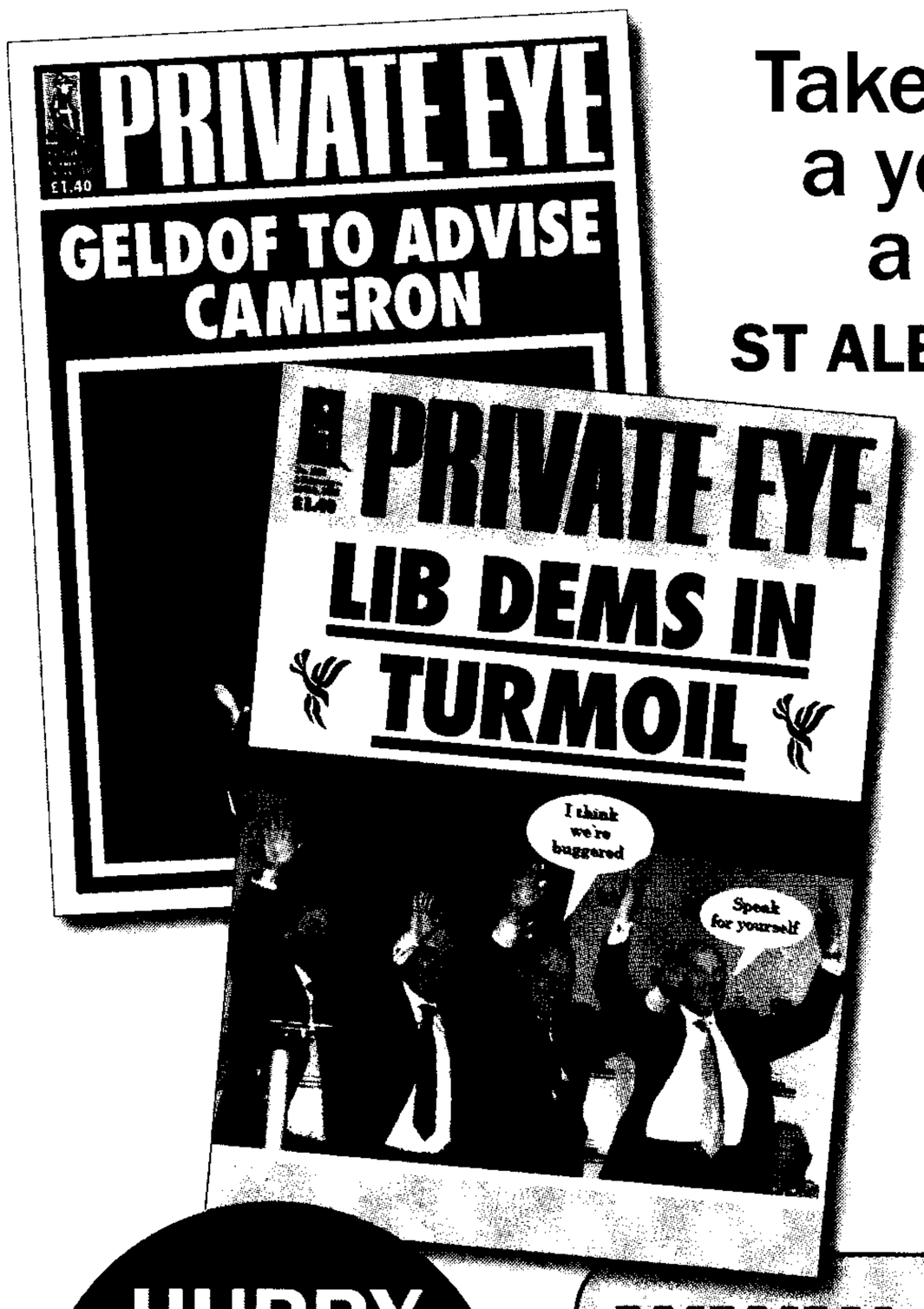

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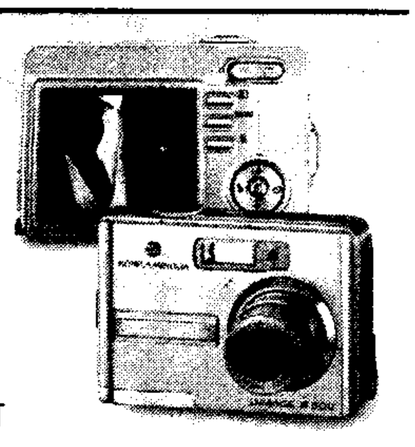

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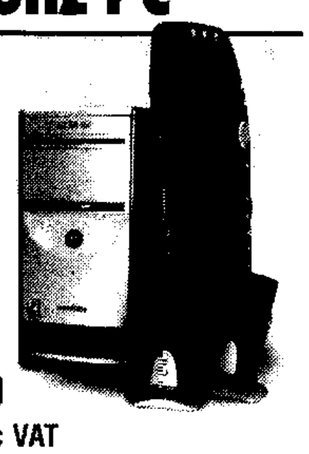

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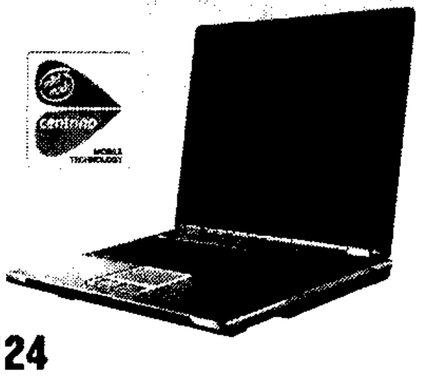
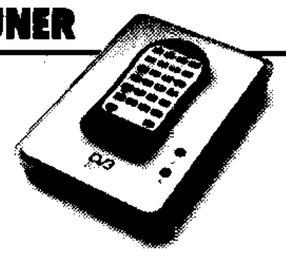


£899.99 ex VAT £1057.24 inc VAT

ARTEC USB FREEVIEW TUNER

- **Watch free-to-air TV on your PC**
- **USB interface - no PSU required**
- **Includes infrared remote control**

Brand new stock, 1 year warranty

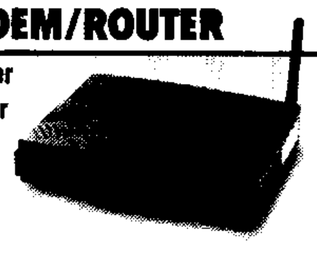


£29.99 ex VAT £35.24 inc VAT

DYNAMODE WIFI MODEM/ROUTER

- **ADSL modem & 11b/g WIFi router**
- **Up to 108Mbps wireless transfer**
- **4 port switch, built-in firewall**

Brand new stock, 1 year warranty



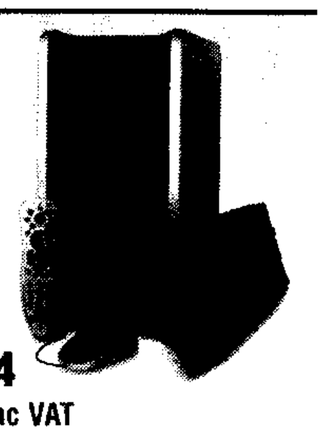
£46.99 ex VAT £55.21 inc VAT

MEDIA CENTRE DESKTOP

Brand name embargo! Boxed with keyboard, mouse and software.

- **Intel P4 640 (3.2GHz) chip**
- **1GB RAM, 250GB hard drive**
- **DVD±R/±W, 256MB graphics**
- **Windows XP Media Centre**

Stock status: Factory refurb stock
Warranty: 1 year on-site warranty



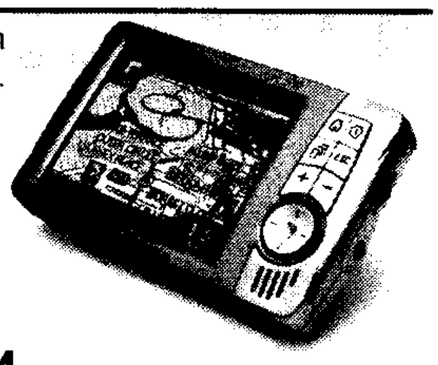
£449.99 ex VAT £528.74 inc VAT

NAVMAN ICN 510 SATNAV SYSTEM

Handheld GPS navigation device with colour screen & UK maps on SD card.

- **Works straight out of the box**
- **High res touch screen display**
- **Spoken and on-screen directions**
- **Includes UK maps & SmartST v3**

Stock status: Grade A refurb stock
Warranty: 1 year RTB warranty



£149.99 ex VAT £176.24 inc VAT NAVMAN

SUB £500 DLP PROJECTOR

Optoma multimedia projector, ideal for business presentations.

- **800 x 600 dpi resolution**
- **1800 Lumens, 2000:1 contrast**
- **Portable design - only 2kg!**
- **Includes carry case & remote**

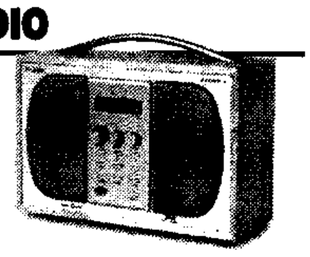
Stock status: Brand new stock
Warranty: 3 year swap-out

£425.52 ex VAT £499.99 inc VAT Optoma

PURE EVOKE-2 DAB RADIO

- **Portable stereo DAB digital radio**
- **More stations, hiss free listening**
- **Powered via mains or batteries**

Re-work stock, 1 year Pure warranty

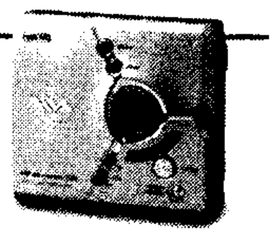


£79.99 ex VAT £93.99 inc VAT

AIWA NX9 NET MINIDISC

- **One touch download from your PC**
- **MDLP mode, up to 32x transfer**
- **Powers from just 1 x AA battery**

Brand new stock, 1 year warranty



£29.99 ex VAT £35.24 inc VAT

TOSHIBA SATELLITE PRO L20

Slimline notebook with double layer DVD burner and integrated WiFi (11g).

- **Intel Pentium-M 740 (1.73GHz) chip**
- **512MB DDR RAM, 40GB hard drive**
- **15" XGA TFT, up to 64MB graphics**
- **56K/LAN/WiFi, Win XP Home Ed.**

Stock status: Brand new stock
Warranty: 1 year International warranty

£549.99 ex VAT £646.24 inc VAT

MSI PERSONAL CINEMA

- **nVidia FX5600 128MB AGP graphics**
- **Built in TV tuner, 128MB RAM**
- **Inc AV in/out box & infrared remote**

New, plain boxed stock, 1 yr warranty

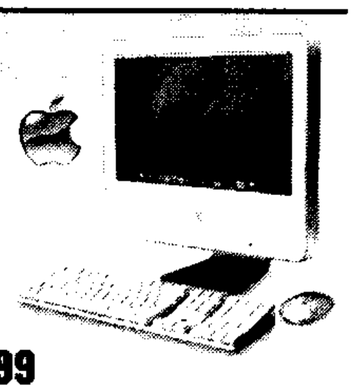
£29.99 ex VAT £35.24 inc VAT MSI

APPLE iMAC G5 17" SYSTEM

Ultra stylish designer PC with integrated 17" widescreen TFT.

- **1.8GHz powerful G5 processor**
- **256MB RAM, 80GB SATA hdd**
- **DVD re-writer, modem/LAN**
- **Inc keyboard/mouse & OS X**

Stock status: Re-work, like new
Warranty: 1 year warranty



£599.99 ex VAT £704.99 inc VAT

LABTEC EDGE WIRELESS DESKSET

- **Slimline multimedia keyboard**
- **Rechargeable optical mouse**
- **PS2 receiver (2 free ports req)**

Brand new stock, 2 year warranty

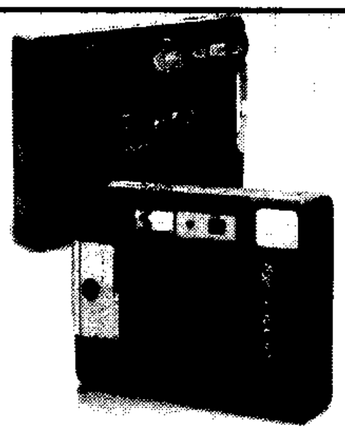
£9.99 ex VAT £11.74 inc VAT Labtec.

ULTRA COMPACT MINOLTA DIGITAL

Dimage Xg with stylish red casing, a 3x optical zoom & movie clips with sound.

- **3.2 megapixel (2048 x 1536 dpi)**
- **Optical viewfinder, LCD screen**
- **Weighs just 120g, only 20mm thick**
- **Accepts SD/MMC memory cards**

Stock status: Grade A Minolta refurbs
Warranty: 6 month Minolta warranty



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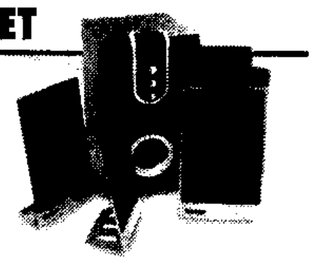
MEDION 5.1 SPEAKER SET

- **5 x NXT flat panel satellites**
- **Subwoofer with integrated amp**
- **Powerful 50W RMS total output**

2nd's stock with 1 year warranty



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